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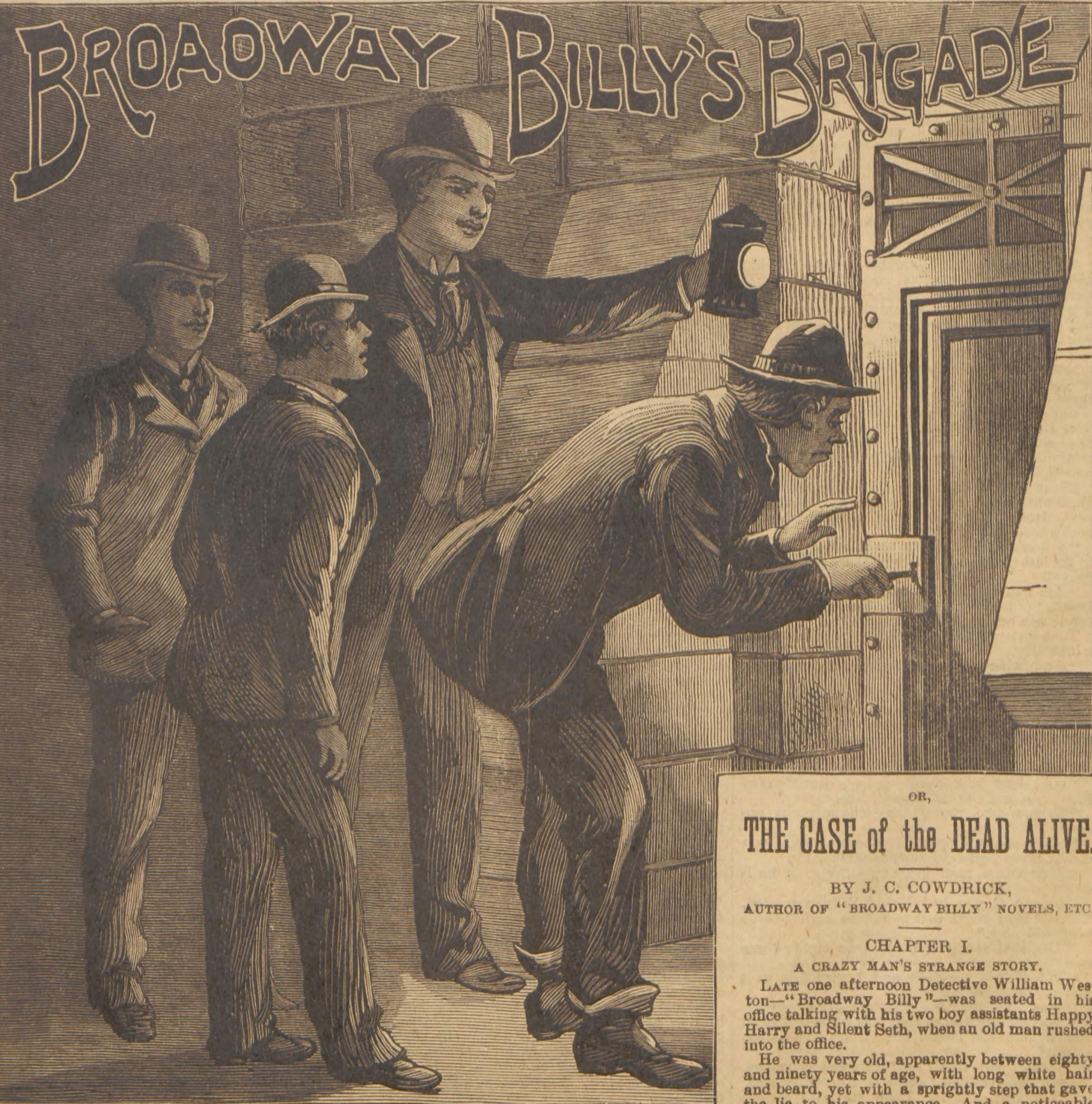
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OR,
THE CASE of the DEAD ALIVE.

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AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A CRAZY MAN'S STRANGE STORY.

LATE one afternoon Detective William Weston—"Broadway Billy"—was seated in his office talking with his two boy assistants Happy Harry and Silent Seth, when an old man rushed into the office.

He was very old, apparently between eighty and ninety years of age, with long white hair and beard, yet with a sprightly step that gave the lie to his appearance. And a noticeable peculiarity was that he was clad in attire more suitable for a boy of ten. He wore knee pants

THE OLD MAN BEGAN FUMBLING AT THE LOCK WITH THE GREAT KEY, WHILE BILLY AND HIS BOYS LOOKED ON EXPECTANTLY.

buttoned to a waist, and black stockings and buttoned shoes.

Broadway Billy and his "beagles" looked at the visitor in surprise, and wonderingly when, closing the door and fixing his gaze upon Harry, he demanded:

"Are you Broadway Billy?"

"Crackers an' cheese! no!" exclaimed the astonished lad.

"I am Broadway Billy, sir," Billy spoke up. "Did you want to see me?"

"You Broadway Billy! Why, the newspapers called Broadway Billy a 'Boy Detective.' You are no boy!"

"Nevertheless, I am Broadway Billy. Won't you sit down, sir?"

The visitor helped himself to a chair.

"I see you are looking at my clothes," he observed. "Odd, isn't it, to see a man of my years dressed so ridiculously? But, it isn't my fault, and as I am a crazy man I can't help it. Yes, I'm crazy, sir."

It was a confession which confirmed the suspicion of all three.

"You don't appear to be very crazy just now, sir," Billy observed.

"No; for just now I am in my right mind, and that is what has brought me to see you."

"How came you to know anything about me?"

"By the newspapers. When I am getting all right in the head I want to see the newspapers all the time, and in them I have seen accounts of you and some of your doings. I believe you are a great boy—man, I mean, and that you can help me wonderfully."

"In what way can I help you?"

"I shall have to tell you my story first, so that you can get hold of the thing right. It is a page from the past, and it involves a vast fortune out of which my rightful heirs have been cheated. I want you to take the matter in hand and bring the thing out all right. Do you think you can do that? Do you think you can find the silver casket?"

"The silver casket?"

"Yes; you see, the valuable papers are hid away in the silver casket or coffin, which is buried with me in my grave. I have not told of this, before, for I was afraid to trust anybody, but I am going to trust you. Say, do you think you can find it?"

Billy decided that the man was a harmless lunatic who had escaped from some institution or other, and by chance, had found his way there.

But, if really a lunatic, how could he have seen the detective's name in the papers, and have come there to consult with him? That certainly did not betray mental obliquity or unreason.

Silent Seth looked on with seeming stoic indifference, as if taking no interest whatever, while Happy Harry, his chin in his hands, was both amused and interested.

"I don't know," Billy made sober response to the last question. "Are you sure it is in your grave?"

"Am I sure of it? Of course I am sure of it! Didn't I hide it with my own hands the day before I was buried? It is with me in my casket."

That statement was conclusive; the man was a lunatic.

"And where are you buried?" Billy quietly asked.

"Where am I buried?" echoed the old man. "Where do you suppose, but in the Hearn family vaults? You can find my coffin there, with my name on it—Ruford Hearn."

"How old are you?"

"I was sixty-one years old when I died."

"And how long have you been dead?" asked Billy, treating the matter with all gravity.

"Twenty-two years," was the prompt answer.

"Sixty-one and twenty-two—that makes you eighty-three years old now, does it not?"

"How can a man get any older after he is dead?"

"I mean if you had lived," Billy corrected. "If you had lived you would be eighty-three years old now."

"Yes, that is right; I would be eighty-three now."

"But, if you are dead and buried, how is it you are here?" he asked.

"This isn't me," the answer came promptly. "It was Ruford Hearn that was buried. Ruford Hearn is in the casket, sir. Don't you understand?"

"I can't say that I do," Billy had to confess.

"Didn't you say your name is Ruford Hearn?"

"Yes, yes; so it is. I am Ruford Hearn; I am dead and buried; that part is all straight

enough. But, here I am, Ruford Hearn, and they will not let me get into my place."

Billy scratched his head.

"I am afraid I can't do much in your case, sir," he said. "It seems to be rather mixed up."

"You don't understand it, sir, you don't understand it yet," the old man complained. "Can't you see how it is? You will have to get it quick or not at all, for I feel it coming on again."

"You feel what coming on?"

"My crazy spell. Then it will be dark—all dark, and you won't be able to get anything out of me."

"You had better tell me at once, then, all that is necessary for me to know, and if it is anything I can take hold of I will do what I can for you. Go right ahead, sir."

"Yes, I will; but it seems so hard for you to understand. You see, my name is Ruford Hearn, and I died twenty-two years ago and was buried. You cannot help understanding that."

"I follow you so far," assured Billy.

"I was a rich man, and I had two sons and three daughters. One son and one daughter were by my first wife, but the other son and two daughters were by my second wife. The first son was my favorite child, as his mother was my first love. Do you still understand me?"

"Yes, that is all plain enough; go ahead with the story."

"Well, sir, in order to make my will so as to give most to those who cared for me, and least to those who cared for my money, I hit upon a plan to learn which of my children did really care for me and which did not. But, before going into it I made all preparations and sealed up valuable papers in the silver coffin."

Billy was watching closely, and following word for word. This man's talk appeared to be sane enough now; but he evidently was growing restless, as if apprehending something that was about to come upon him, and which he dreaded.

"Yes, yes," he said quickly; "valuable papers—silver coffin; yes, yes, so I did. I was taken sick then—I, Ruford Hearn, you understand; and I died and they buried me. But, they didn't know about the silver casket; no, they didn't; and that is what would tell a story for them if they could find it. Nobody knows about the silver casket sir; no one but you, and you must find it. You will find it with me in my coffin."

Here the talk was wild again, so Billy decided. It was all the idle fancy of a disordered mind, and nothing more.

"But, what will become of you when I take the coffin up and open it?" the young detective questioned.

To the amazement of the trio the old man burst out crying, as any schoolboy of eight might have done, at the same time digging his fists into his eyes in true childish fashion.

"What's the matter?" Billy asked, after a moment of silence.

"Boo-hoo-oo—" came the tearful response, "I want Bobby to play marbles with me, and he—boo-hoo-oo—and he won't do it. Boo-hoo-oo-oo—"

In spite of themselves Billy and Happy Harry had to laugh, but Silent Seth merely looked on as unmoved as a statue, yet evidently thinking deeply about the whole matter.

"Won't he play with you?" asked Billy, soothingly.

"No, he won't; an' he has been callin' me names, too. Boo-hoo-oo—"

"Never mind," said Billy; "here is a boy who will play with you. Just try him, Seth."

The last was said to Seth, aside.

"Come on," Seth invited, "and it's my first play."

"No, it's my first play!" the old fellow disputed. "If I can't go first I won't play at all."

"All right; you shall play first," assured Billy. "But, where are your marbles? Have you got any with you?"

For answer the old man went down into a pocket and pulled out a big handful of marbles of all sorts and sizes, and dropping to his knees on the floor he began to arrange them for a game.

Silent Seth took part with him, helping him to arrange them, but irrepressible Harry stood back and was fairly holding his sides to keep from exploding with laughter, while Broadway Billy looked on with a smile, partly amused and partly in sympathy, although baffled.

There is nothing new under the sun, 'tis said,

but here was something new in his experience, truly. Never had he run up against anything like this.

CHAPTER II.

ALTOGETHER A STRANGE MATTER.

It was an amusing yet a pitiable sight. Happy Harry saw only the ludicrous part of it, but Broadway Billy was deeply moved by the spectacle.

Silent Seth, while he was helping to arrange the marbles, managed to "hook" several of them with which to play, and, as soon as they had been placed the game commenced.

The old man played first, and his first play demonstrated his skill.

The game was one of the oldest, known to every schoolboy, and Silent Seth's turn proved that he knew something about it, too.

As the aged man played he moved around with as much ease as Seth, apparently, and as the game progressed it was seen that he was getting the better of his more youthful opponent.

"Crackers an' cheese!" cried Harry. "Don't let him wax ye that way, Stoick. Go in an' show him what ye kin do. You don't want to let anybody get ahead of this office at anything, not even at marbles. Now ye've got him; slap in a sockdolager an' swipe his alley."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the old man, in glee. "He can't do it! Hold on; no scrougin' over the taw, now. Don't you punch, nuther. Ha, ha, ha! You didn't do it, and you owe me another one! Now watch me, and I'll show you how to do it. See? Just this way."

The old fellow flipped with care, and away went Seth's last marble.

"I haven't got any more," Seth had to admit.

"Why, this is one of my own," the old fellow cried, after looking closely at the taw he had just won. "You have been stealin' on me!"

With boyish anger he scowled at Seth, and immediately began to examine and count his stock of marbles, to make sure that no more had been taken from him, and no sooner had he done than he sprung up showing fight.

"You have been stealin'!" he cried. "I won six off o' you, and I ain't got no more'n I had when I commenced. Come, now, you give me them marbles or I'll give ye a good lickin', an' I can do it, too. Give 'em here, I say, or I'll down ye an' take 'em."

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry, dancing about in high glee. "You will get it now, Seth, if you ever did! He'll varnish you off in fine style, you see if he don't. Let's make a ring, boss, and see which one will come out best man. This is as good as a coon weddin' and a cake-walk. Wake up, Philosopher, or you will get a bang on the nose 'fore ye know it."

The old fellow was moving up to Seth with his fists doubled and ready for action, but Seth was backing off to keep out of reach.

"Will ye give me my marbles?" the old man demanded, sharply.

"I haven't got any," Seth declared.

"Yes you have, too, and I want 'em. How did you play if you didn't have any marbles?"

"Why, I was playing with some of yours. It's all right; you have got just as many as you had, and we played only in fun, you know."

The old man began to cry.

"No, it wasn't in fun, either," he blurted out. "I—boo-hoo—I was playin' for keeps, and I—boo-hoo-oo—I want the six marbles too. It ain't fair, the way you played."

"Never mind the six marbles," Billy urged; "the boy did not understand just how you wanted to play. I will get you a nice lot of marbles."

"Will you, though? Really?"

The childish old man stopped crying at once, and his face beamed.

"Yes I will, truly," Billy assured. "I will buy you a nice lot of them some day. But, what is your name and where do you live?"

"My name is Thomas Tobias Brown, sir, and I live at Doctor Dray's. They let us play marbles all we want to, there. They call me Tommy, sir."

"And where is Doctor Dray's?" Billy inquired.

"Don't you know Doctor Dray?" in boyish amaze.

"No; never heard of him."

"That is funny; I thought everybody knowed Doctor Dray."

"Where do you say he lives, Tommy?"

Billy was humoring the old man's strange hallucination.

"And don't you know where he lives, either? Why, all of us boys know where Doctor Dray lives."

"Well, where does he live?"

"In the great, big house around the corner and next door to the play-ground."

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Happy Harry, "that's a straight clew, isn't it, though! He's as crazy as a bed-bug."

"Who is crazy?" demanded the aged boy, turning upon him.

"Why, the man in the moon, you know," responded Harry, promptly.

"I thought you meant me, and I was going to say I'm not as crazy as I look. Some boys are foolish, and that's a good deal worse than crazy."

Happy Harry drew a long face and put his hand over his mouth, acknowledging that the old fellow had hit him once and that he had better remain quiet if he did not want to get worsted.

Silent Seth glanced at him with the suggestion of a smile playing around his mouth.

Billy was interested, puzzled, amused.

What to think of such a case as this, if it could be called a case at all, he did not know. The old man had certainly said some strange things. He wondered whether he would now remember anything about the story he had told.

"By the way, Tommy, how about Mr. Hearn?" he asked.

"Eh?" the old fellow queried.

"How about Mr. Hearn? Mr. Ruford Hearn, you know."

"Oh, yes! He is dead, sir; he died a long time ago. Doctor Dray used to know him. He could tell you about him."

"Then you didn't know him yourself, eh?"

"Oh, no; he died long before I was born."

"And how old are you, Tommy?"

"Eleven, sir."

Billy saw that it was of no use. The old man's mind was now a complete or total blank concerning what he had been talking about so short a time before.

He was about to question the old luny further, to try to draw him out, or to bring his mind back again to what he had been talking about at first, but just then the door opened and another personage stepped into the office.

This time it was a young man, one not over thirty, so Billy decided. He entered with an eager, expectant air, and the moment his eyes fell upon the old man in the boyish attire, his face lighted up, and a smile told the story.

He had come in search of the old lunatic.

"Why, Tommy, what are you doing here?" he demanded, in a reproving way.

"I have been playing marbles," the old man respectfully answered. "Is it time to go in now?"

"Yes, it is time to go home now," was the rather coaxing response.

As he spoke, the young man winked at Broadway Billy, touching his forehead with his finger to indicate what was the matter with the old man.

"How did you find him here?" Billy asked.

This was the question which had come to his mind the moment he discovered whom the young man was looking for. Had the man been following? If so, why had he remained so long in the background? Billy was suspicious. The young man's explanation, however, appeared to be both reasonable and probable.

"Why, by a lucky find," was his response. "You see, sir, the old fellow has spells, when he is crazy in another direction," speaking low, "and when the change comes on he is eager for newspapers. When we missed him we happened to find his coat in the playground where he had been playing marbles, and in a pocket of it was a clipping from a paper with your address on it."

"And that led you to believe he had come here, eh?"

"Well, it gave us an idea. We hunted all around the neighborhood until we had to give it up; then Doctor Dray told me to come here, as possibly he had wandered down this way. He was led to this conclusion by the fact that he had meantime found more clippings in Tommy's room concerning some of the work you have been doing. I take it that you are Mr. Weston, the detective? Anyhow, that's the whole of it. I hope he hasn't been troublesome."

"Not a bit," assured Billy.

"You could see at once that he is off."

"Oh! to be sure. Anybody could see that. I humored him."

"Well, I'll take him home, now. I suppose he has been telling some queer tales."

"He has told only the truth, I take it, from what you yourself have said. He said he was in school or something of the sort kept by Doctor Dray. He thought it strange that I should not know the doctor."

"Yes, that is the way he talks. But, that was all straight; the wonder is that he did not annoy you with some wonderful yarns his crazy mind has hatched out. He has queer fancies, sometimes, when he is passing from one crazy spell to the other. It is a peculiar case."

"Then he never comes into his right mind?"

"No, never. He is hopelessly mad. He is old, and there can be but one release for him now."

"I see it is too bad. I suppose you are connected with Doctor Dray's establishment—But, you have said as much. Where is this asylum? It is one I have never heard of, I believe."

"It is at No. — West — street. Yes, I am a student under Doctor Dray, finishing a special course, and a sort of helper around the institution, besides. Well, I will be going with my charge while he is in the humor. Come on, Tommy, and we'll go home now."

He held out his hand in a fatherly way, and the old man ran and placed his hand in it willingly and was led away like a little child.

The young man nodded and smiled a good-by as he passed out and as soon as the door had closed after the pair Broadway Billy and his aids stood for a few moments looking at each other in expressive silence.

"Something strange about this," finally declared Billy. "The more I think about it the more I think there is more in it than a mere case of lunacy. That fellow seemed mighty eager to learn what the old man had been letting out. We have got something on hand, boys, or I miss my guess, and I'm going to look into the affair further and see what will come of it. It may be time wasted; but, the detective fever is coming on and there is only one way to check it. What do you say?"

CHAPTER III.

GROWING STRANGER STILL.

"CHRISTOPHER COLUMBIA!" cried Harry. "What do we say? I'll speak for myself, and Seth is old enough to do the same; if he won't that isn't my fault. I'll bet crackers an' cheese to a Harlem goat there is a son o' Ham in the fence somewhere or other. We have got a rattled old none-such to deal with, though, and it's beans to buttons whether we'll be able to make head or tail of it or not."

"That sums it up, I guess," acquiesced Billy. "What do you think about it, Silent Seth?"

"I think there is something in that story about a silver casket or coffin, but I don't believe the old man will ever tell any more about it than he has told already."

"And I about agree with you, too," said Billy. "There has been something in the past to make such an impression upon his mind, but what it was is probably more than he will ever be able to explain in full."

"And now you tell us how it strikes you," requested Harry.

"I have done so already," Billy returned. "You two took it up where I left off and have about finished all there is to say about it. Regarding that silver casket or coffin as he says it is, and the secret it contains, however, I will say that, if there is anything in it I believe others must know about it."

"And that was the reason the fellow was so eager to learn what the old man had been talking about, hey?" guessed Harry.

"So it strikes me. There may be nothing in it at all, but, as we have the time to spare we will look into it, or attempt to do so. We have the clew to go to work on, if it proves to be of any use."

"A clew?" questioned Harry. "You mean the name he claims is his, and the story he told about his family affairs?"

"Yes. I'll inquire into the Hearn family, to find out whether there ever was a Ruford Hearn or not. If I find there was, I'll look up his history and see what became of him, and so get a start. See?"

"You bet! I feel my blood begin to ferment, and I'm ripe for anything that promises fun. And here's Seth, my deaf-an'-dumb pard, just see his eyes snap, will you! I bet he is making up his mind what he will do if he gets a chance to wrangle with a lunatic asylum."

Billy smiled, and it being about time to close up, he and the boys left the office and went home.

On the way Broadway Billy had on his thinking cap, and considered the case in all its possible aspects. What his speculations were we may infer from the sequence.

Next morning before going to the office he

dropped into an old drug store to look at the Directory of twenty-two years ago.

It was handed out to him, and turning to "H" he came to "Hearn," and then looked for the name "Ruford." There it was, as he soon found, and took note of the address.

"Well, there is one bit of proof that the old man knew what he was talking about, anyhow," he mused. "There was a Ruford Hearn in this city twenty-two years ago, but there is no such name to be found to-day. What became of him? That will be the first step to take in the case."

When Billy reached the office Harry and Seth had it opened and ready for business, as usual.

Billy was a little late, and he had barely entered when a man stepped into the office, the young man who, on the previous day, had come to take the aged lunatic away.

"Good-morning!" he greeted, with his easy nod and smile. "I suppose you did not expect to see me again so soon, but here I am. I came to look for one of Tommy's marbles, which he thinks he lost here. Ha, ha, hal Rather a young chap to be playing at marbles, isn't he?"

"Rather young, that is true," Billy assented, laughingly. "I do not think he lost the marble here, however. You did not find one when you cleaned out, did you, boys?"

Both answered in the negative.

"No; he did not lose it here," Billy assured. "If he had, it would have been discovered. Too bad, for I suppose the little chap cried about it, did he not? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes; and is crying yet. Like somebody or other mentioned in the Bible, he refuses to be comforted. I don't know what we'll do to pacify him, for he knows every one of his marbles as well as a mother knows her children, and it would be impossible to impose upon him."

"His is a strange case, isn't it?"

"It is that. And, as I told you yesterday, a hopeless on. Well, I won't bother you, since the marble has not been found. Doctor Dray wanted me to thank you, by the way, for taking care of his old patient till I arrived."

"Oh! that was nothing; don't mention it. And, by the way, I promised him some new marbles. If you can wait a few moments I'll send one of the boys out to get him some. It may pacify him and so save you trouble. It might take his mind away from the lost marble, you know."

"Really," responded the young man, "I think that would do it, but I did not want to mention it to you. He has been complaining that you promised him some marbles but had not sent them. I intended buying him some myself and telling him they were from you. We have to do all sorts of things to keep their disordered wits under proper control, you know."

"Yes, I see. I'll send them as I promised, so you will not have to fib about it. Here, Harry, you step out and buy a dozen of the prettiest you can find."

And giving Harry some money, the boy went off at once upon the errand.

"How many such patients does Doctor Dray have?" Billy inquired.

"We have over twenty of them, sir, just now."

"I imagine they are not all so peaceable as the old man who was here."

"No, indeed! Some of them have to be dealt with pretty severely once in awhile, to bring them to their senses."

"And they have all sorts of queer ideas in their addled brains, I suppose! I heard of a crazy man once who imagined he was a fly, and who worried himself to death because he had lost the use of his wings."

"Yes, yes; they have all manner of notions. There is Tommy—Brown, I mean, who was here—he has a belief that he is dead, and that in life he was somebody else. It's a wonder he did not tell you all about that. But, I suppose marbles had taken possession his mind."

"He had marbles on the brain, badly. Who does he think he used to be? But, of course you pay little attention to his prattle, and it does not matter."

"No, I don't know much about it. He thinks he was a rich man, and I guess he has had some money trouble of some sort some time in the past. Knowing who he is, however, we know he was never very rich."

"You say his name is Brown?"

"Yes; Thomas Tobias Brown. Name enough, you will agree."

"Quite. I was not sure; I know you mentioned Brown, but was not certain it was not your own name."

"Oh, no; my name is Gaddas—Alarie Gaddas, sir."

There was further talk, which was interrupted by the return of Harry with the marbles.

"Ha! these are nice ones!" said Billy. "They will make the heart of the old fellow glad, I think. At any rate I hope so. Take them to him with my best regards. He seemed to take a fancy to me."

"I will do so. Yes, he thinks quite well of you, and has mentioned your name a good many times this morning. For the most part though, in connection with the promise you made. Well, I'll be off. We'll try to watch him better so that he will not trouble you again."

With that the man took his leave, carrying the marbles with him, while Silent Seth gazed thoughtfully at the closed door.

"Now, it's one thing or the other," mused Billy. "Either he came on purpose to try again to find out what the old man had been telling here, or his story was true. I'm inclined to think it's the latter."

"Crackers an' cheese!" ejaculated Harry. "That son o' Ham in the fence is stirrin', for I begin to smell him. Don't it hit you that he has come here mighty early in the mornin', boss? They know what you are, when you get hold of a mystery, and I bet they don't rest easy."

"It's the fact that he was here early, for one thing, that leads me to believe his story to be true," responded Billy. "You have to weigh everything, you know, in getting at the bottom of a matter. Then, if you took notice, it was I who turned the conversation upon the old fellows peculiar madness. Gaddas made no more than a passing remark."

"Well, you had orter know best; but I smell nigger all the same, and the fever is on the rise."

"And what think you, Silent Seth?"

It was Seth's plan never to speak unless he had something to say, and he seldom expressed an opinion unless asked for it.

"I think I'd like to know the secret of that silver casket," was the reply. "I feel sure there is such a thing, or something to start the idea, and the more I think about it the more I want to know more about it."

"Christopher Columbia!" exclaimed Happy Harry, springing forward and laying a hand under Seth's chin as he stopped speaking. "Don't you know any better than that, Seth? You mustn't undertake to say so much all at once; no telling what awful consequences ye may bring upon yourself."

"That is my case, exactly," declared Billy, rejoining to Seth's response. "I have found out that there was a Rufus Hearn in this city twenty-two years ago, and I know where he lived. I am going, now, to see if any of the family are living there still and to learn what I can about them. You boys hold the office down until I return."

Billy was about to take his leave when the door opened and a woman came in, a woman past the middle age of life.

"Are you Mr. Weston, sir?" she asked, at once.

"I am," answered Billy.

"And you are the detective, Broadway Billy?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then it's you I want to see. My house has been robbed, in a mysterious manner, and I want you to find the thief and recover the stolen things."

"Pray sit down and tell me all about it, and I will see what can be done. Give me your name and place of residence first."

"Well, my name is Jane Hearn, and I reside at No. — street. The house was entered yesterday while I was taking my afternoon nap, and some valuable papers were stolen. How the thief got in and out again, puzzles me; but I think it must have been a boy, for I found this marble on the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

COMPLICATIONS ARISING.

HERE was a surprise.

As the woman spoke she held a marble up to view, and the trio instantly recognized it as being similar to several which the old man had played with there in the office on the previous day.

It was only by bringing his will power to serve him promptly that Broadway Billy avoided exclaiming "Sweet pertaters!" while Happy Harry had to clap his hand over his mouth to hold back the "Christopher Columbia!" that rose to his lips, but Silent Seth—he remained as stoical and impassive as an Indian.

In one brief second many thoughts passed

through Billy's mind. The street and number the woman had given were the same that, as he had learned by the old Directory, had been the address of Ruford Hearn! Then, this marble—Had the crazy man paid a visit to that house before coming to the office, and there lost it? That he had lost one somewhere had been declared by Gaddas.

And if so, then what? Was he not really Ruford Hearn, as he had declared his name to be during his interval of semi-sanity? And if Ruford Hearn, why was he called Thomas Tobias Brown, at the asylum? Here was a mystery, truly. The clew of the lost marble forged a strong link in the chain of circumstances which went to prove that there was truth at least in the story the old fellow had told. If the old man was Ruford Hearn, then Ruford Hearn certainly was not dead. Perhaps he had been wholly sane for a brief while, and had visited his old home?

All this passed through Billy's mind in a moment, as said, but his face gave no indication of his thoughts.

"Let me see the marble," he requested.

The woman gave it to him.

There was no mistaking it; it was exactly like some the crazy man had shown among his collection.

"You are sure this was not in your house before the robbery, madam?" Billy inquired.

"Of course I am sure," emphatically. I swept the house with my own hands this morning, and had it been there I would have found it."

Jane Hearn was clearly a positive woman. She had a grim face, and her thin lips closed in that straight line which always implies firmness.

"If that is the case," remarked Billy, "it is pretty certain the intruder lost it there. I agree with you, too, that it is a sign the person was a boy. But, you say he took important papers?"

"Yes, sir; important papers."

"That gives it a different aspect, for a boy would have been more apt to take money or trifles; don't you think so?"

"Yes, that's so," thoughtfully.

"What sort of papers were taken?" Billy next asked.

"All the valuable ones I had, sir; deeds, bonds, and so forth. They could not possibly be of any use to any one else, yet very valuable to me. That being the case, does it not still look reasonable that the rascal was a boy?"

"Well, yes; unless you have some relation who is your enemy, and who could in some way make use of the papers against you."

"I have not; and, they could not be used against me."

"Then, perhaps, some enemy who, by destroying them, would work out a spite or wrong against you that way."

"I do not think I have an enemy, sir; and I certainly have none who could know anything about the papers. I tell you I am greatly mystified over it. What puzzles me most, how did the rascal get in?"

"To offer any explanation of that, madam, it will be necessary for me to examine the premises. But have you no suspicion against any one? Perhaps it has been a servant, one now in your employ, or one who has been dismissed? Think well, and perhaps you will—"

"No, no, it's nothing of that kind. I have no servants, and have never had any. The truth is, I live all alone."

"Then it is strange."

"Of course it is strange, sir, or I would not have come to you. I am good at thinking, if I do say it myself, but I could not fathom this matter."

"You mentioned bonds among the papers missing: Was there among them one which some person might particularly desire to see destroyed?"

"I believe not. They were old papers, all of them, and have been in force for years, and always honored. I can see no object why any one should want to take them."

"You say your name is Jane Hearn? Are you a widow?"

"No, I am a maiden lady."

"How long have you lived all alone, if I may ask?"

"A good many years, sir. But, why do you ask such questions? How can this have anything to do with the case?"

"In this way: Living alone, perhaps you walk in your sleep, and it may be you have taken these papers yourself and put them in some other place. I do not say it is so; I merely suggest it."

The woman smiled disdainfully.

"I am not a sleepwalker, sir," she declared. "I should have found it out long ago. Why would

I not have disturbed something before? Besides, do you forget the marble I found?"

"No, I do not forget it," Billy made answer. "Mind you, I only make suggestions. Do you want me to take the matter in hand, madam, to learn what I can about it? If so, I will go with you to your home and look around the premises, after which I may be able to suggest something."

"That was what brought me here, sir. I have read a great deal about you of late, and I thought if any one could solve the mystery you could."

"Thank you. I will go with you at once and we'll see what is to be discovered there."

With some words of instruction aside to Harry and Seth, Billy set out with the woman for her residence.

No sooner had they left the office than Harry tossed his hat to the ceiling, executed an excited but silent dance in the middle of the floor, and then, to give further vent to his feelings, stood upon his head.

Silent Seth looked on in stoical fashion, but did not take any part in the demonstration, although he understood full well the occasion of Harry's antics.

"Why don't ye say somethin', Philosopher?" Harry demanded, when he had righted himself, finally.

"Because I have nothing to say."

"Nothing to say? Christopher Columbia! Would you say anything if the house was afire?" Seth merely shrugged his shoulders.

"You beat all the Dutch in Hoboken, that's what you do," Harry declared. "You haven't any more sensibility than a clam. Don't you see what's in the wind? The boss has got hold of the big end of one of the consarnedest difficulties you ever heard of, and if there isn't a sifting of secrets before long you may take my head for a stone-thumper."

Seth nodded.

"That yarn your marble chum told was all true, and more too; crackers an' cheese, yes! He's Ruford Hearn, and you can bet on it; the only thing is, he isn't as dead as he thinks he is. You wait till the boss comes back and see if he don't have a tale to unfold that will make your two eyes bulge out. I told you I smelt nigger in the fence, and so I did. But, we haven't begun to get at the bottom of this matter yet. I'll bet there's more than one interested in that silver casket, if there is such a thing," and Harry rattled on until the door opened to admit another caller.

This time the visitor was a man past middle age—a brisk, business-like person, who, sharply glancing around the room, inquired for the proprietor.

"He has gone out, sir," answered Harry. "He may be back in an hour or so. Will you leave your card, sir?"

"Are you two the lads who are working with him in the detective line, and with such good results, as I have seen by the papers? If so, I'll leave word with you for him."

"We're his team of ponies, sir."

"You look like it," smilingly. "Well, my name is Tilford Millard. I am a lawyer. My office is at No. — street. Don't forget the name and address, for your employer may want to come and see me."

"We've got it chalked down on the slate o' memory, sir," Harry assured.

The lawyer smiled.

"Very well; here are some papers which I will leave with you to be given to your master as soon as he comes in. Tell him I found them in my office in a rather remarkable way, and seeing his name and address penciled on the back of the package, have brought them to him. It is a mystery how they came in my office, but, as his name and office address are on them I take it he has some knowledge of it, so I will leave them here. Tell him they have bearing on the Hearn affair—"

"Christopher Columbia!" ejaculated Harry, at mention of that name.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Millard.

The mention of the name had not caused so much as the lifting of a brow on the part of the imperturbable Seth.

"Why, it seems the Hearn affair has taken possession of this office just now, sir," Harry admitted before he gave thought to the disclosure he was making. "That is the business Mr. Weston is on now, sir, and when you mentioned the name it naturally struck me."

"I see; and that being the case, of course he will know all about these papers. It is a case that created a great sensation some twenty odd years ago, and that it should be coming up again is a surprise. I happened to figure in it at that

time; in fact, I occupy the office Mr. Hearn used to have. But, this can be of no interest to you. Just tell your master I brought the papers in person, and that I am rather curious to know how they came in my office, if nothing more."

With that the lawyer delivered the papers to Harry and was gone, when Harry immediately proceeded to stand on his head as before, flourishing his legs wildly.

CHAPTER V. THE PECULIAR PAPER.

In the mean time Broadway Billy had accompanied Spinster Hearn to her home, a quaint, old-fashioned house on a quiet street that had somehow been left behind in the march of progress business had been making since it was built.

Little had been said on the way, and nothing concerning the matter in which they were interested. As soon as she had opened the door and admitted the detective, however, the woman turned to him and invited him to proceed in his own way to make an investigation.

"I noticed that you opened the door with a latch-key," remarked Billy. "Is that the only fastening it has?"

"Oh! no; I bolt it with these two bolts at night, besides locking the big lock. No burglar could possibly get in this way."

"But, how was it yesterday afternoon when you were taking your nap? It was then, you say, that the robbery was committed. Was it bolted then?"

"No; but the latch was on, and I know there is only one key that fits it and I have that. You may think it possible that some one did enter this way, but I know better, sir."

"Why are you so positive?"

"Because the lock is as old as the house itself, nearly, and I have the only key."

"Well, taking that view it, let us see what other means was possible for the offender to gain admission into the house. How about the windows, madam?"

"They were all secured as you see them now."

"And the rear door?"

"Was bolted."

"Then what other chance was there for any one to get in, besides the chance that some one had a key to the front door?"

"It was to learn just that, sir, that I called upon you. The front door is not to be considered, for there is but one key to it, and here it is. It was in my pocket at the time."

"Very well, taking your view of it we will drop the front door entirely for the present. Have you disturbed any other door or window since the robbery took place? If not, I will go and examine them one by one, and it is possible I may discover some signs."

"Not a window has been disturbed, but I have looked at every one, from the top of the house to the bottom, and every one is fast. The doors have been used since, of course."

"When did you discover the robbery, madam?"

"Last night."

"How came you to make the discovery?"

"I went to my desk for the purpose of making out a bill for rent for one of my tenants, and found the drawer unlocked and the papers gone. That set me to searching around, and I found the marble."

"I see. And where was the marble found?"

"Here in the hall, between the front door and the door of the library."

"That is enough. I will not take the trouble to look at any other doors or windows, but will take your word for the condition they were in."

Billy had made up his mind, knowing what he did, that the robber had been none other than the crazy man, and believed that he had gained admission to the house by means of a latch-key.

"Let me see the desk," he next asked.

He was conducted into the room called the library, where a large, old-fashioned desk occupied a place at one side.

"You kept this locked?" Billy asked.

"Yes; but the key was usually in the lock, for, being alone, I never thought it necessary to take it out. My father usually did the same."

"I take it he is dead."

"Yes; he died twenty-two years ago."

Billy dropped it at that, for the present. He knew now that Jane was the daughter of Ruford.

"I suppose you have searched the house well for these missing papers, have you not?" he next asked.

"Thoroughly, sir."

"Then there is only one thing to think about

it, and that is that they were taken by some person who had an object in taking them, or else by a common thief, who grabbed them in haste and made off, thinking he had made a valuable haul."

"But, how did he get in and how did he get out again?"

"Where were you when taking that nap, madam?"

"I was lying on the lounge, in the room right next to this."

"And you are positive the robbery was done while you were there, are you?"

"It could not have been done at any other time, for I was at the desk in the morning, and the papers were here then."

That settled it in Billy's mind.

"If you will give me a description of each paper that is missing," he said, "it will help me to recognize them if they come to my notice anywhere. This has the appearance of a hopeless case to you, no doubt, but I think I see light ahead, and I will undertake to do what I can."

"What do you think of the explanation of it, sir?"

"I prefer not to say, yet. I believe I have a clew, however, and will set to work at once."

"Well, I suppose I shall have to trust it to you. If you discover anything, of course you will come here and let me know?"

"You shall be informed, certainly."

The woman gave a description of the papers, Billy making a note of each, and then he took his leave.

It had been his intention to question the woman about her father and the family in general, but on second thought he had decided not to do so, since it would arouse suspicion.

He could, he believed, easily find some one who had known Mr. Hearn, and who could give him the story of the old man's life in full. The affair had taken on such a peculiar phase that he wanted to be sure of his ground before making anything known to this woman.

One thing he considered strange. If she knew aught of the aged crazy man and his passion for marbles, why had she not suspected *him*? He was led to the conclusion that she could know nothing about him and his claim to being Ruford Hearn. There was a mystery here, and it seemed to be growing deeper at every step. What was to come of it all?

Billy had spent a considerable time at the house, and now set out upon the return to his office.

Meanwhile something of importance had been taking place there.

After the departure of Mr. Millard, the lawyer, and while hilarious Harry was giving expression to his excitement by standing on his head, Silent Seth took the papers to look at them, which had the effect to bring Harry to business, and together they proceeded to scrutinize the documents.

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry, at once. "It is jest as I thought, an' that's what made me antic up so. I thought right off these were the papers the woman had missed, Seth, and now I know it! See, there's her name!"

Silent Seth nodded to that.

"And, you can bet your boots it was the old man who left them at the lawyer's office. Didn't Mr. Millard say he had the same office Ruford Hearn used to occupy? I tell you, Seth, we are onto it as big as a house, now, as sure as crackers an' cheese is a dish for a king."

"He didn't say Ruford Hearn," Seth reminded.

"I know; but *here* is Ruford Hearn, on these papers, and he's the man he meant, sure enough."

They took the papers up one by one and examined them, taking note that they were in the nature of deeds, bonds, mortgages, etc., and that nearly every one bore the name of Hearn.

The last paper of all, however, was a puzzle to them.

It was not folded like the rest, and did not appear to have been one of the same packet. It was yellow with age, dirty and worn with long use, and was torn in half, down the center, one half being missing.

It had always been folded in one way, through the center and once over from that, and the center fold had worn the paper away so that it had evidently dropped apart at last, or had been so very easy to tear that some slight strain had separated the halves.

On one corner of the half that remained was the rude picture of a coffin, over which was a drawing of a common try-square with the inches indicated upon it, evidently for the purpose of indicating the size of the coffin. If this were so, the coffin was only a miniature affair, being not

more than sixteen inches in length and otherwise properly proportioned.

The body of the paper contained drawings, evidently the plan of some building, or part of a building, with indicating figures here and there upon it. At the bottom was writing in what appeared to be some system or other of short-hand. In the center of the paper, as it had been as a whole, were illustrations of a square, compass, trowel, etc., grouped, and partly below these was an index pointing toward the top of the half of the paper that was wanting.

"Christopher Columbia!" exploded Harry, when the two lads had studied it for some moments in silence. "What do ye make of it, Seth?"

"I think it's the key to the hiding-place of the silver casket," was the secretive boy's reply.

"It's beans to buttons you are right," Harry asserted.

They fell to studying it again.

Time passed rapidly, for the more they pored over the peculiar paper the more puzzling it became, and they were still at it when the door opened and another caller dropped in.

It was an old, wrinkled man, small in stature, with the face of a hawk for keenness and cunning. His eyes snapped and flashed as he glanced around the room. He was clad in seedy black, and wore a silk hat that had long since been out of style. He appeared very eager.

Seth thrust the torn paper into a pocket, while happy Harry stepped forward to learn the man's business.

The man, however, did not speak, but looked eagerly about the floor, as if searching for something. Then he stepped toward the desk, where the papers lay, and as he looked at them an exclamation escaped him.

"Ha!" in an exultant way; and before either of the boys could guess his purpose he had gathered the papers up and had thrust them into his pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

GROWING IN INTEREST.

"CHRISTOPHER COLUMBIA!" cried Harry, as soon as his surprise enabled him to speak. "What are you up to, anyhow, mister? If you don't want to get into a consarned diffikilty, you shell out those papers, and do it quick, too. The jeejeeb hath spoken. Selah!"

Harry was almost as big as the little old man, and bristled up to him in a way that meant business, like a young bantam looking for fight.

"Keep cool, sonny, keep cool!" the old fellow enjoined, as he coolly buttoned his coat over the papers he had pocketed. "These documents are mine, and I came here on purpose to *get* them. It is all right. It is all right, sonny, it is all right. Don't let us have any trouble about it now. Just tell your employer the owner called for them—"

"No, I'll be hanged if it's all right!" cried Harry. "You are not going out of this office with those papers before the boss comes, and don't you forget it. I don't know you, and I don't believe you knew the papers were here until you saw them. Hold on, now, for it ain't any use; you can't take 'em off, and that settles it. Seth, you just fasten that door, and we'll see if we can't hold the fort till the boss comes."

Seth had already taken his station at the door, and his hand was in a place where a weapon might be.

"There is no need for this harshness, young gentlemen," spoke the old man, in the mildest of tones. "The papers are mine, and I shall certainly take them with me. It will be all right; all you have to do is to tell your employer I came for them in person, and it will be all right."

"Who told you they were here?" Harry demanded.

"Why, your employer, of course; I have seen him and it is all right—"

"Taper right off there, now," Harry interrupted. "You are telling a lie, straight from the shoulder. The boss don't know himself, yet, that the papers are here. You just drop 'em."

"Ha!" the man exclaimed, as if to himself, "so much the better, then. Why, boy, how dare you use such language to a man of my years?" he demanded sharply and in a louder tone. "Stand out of my way, for I must be going. Just say to your employer that I came—"

"I have got somethin' to say to you first," cried Harry. "Either you give up those papers, or you stay right here. We mean business, and you can bet on it."

"I'll do neither the one nor the other, young upstart!" cried the old man, his eyes flashing. "Out of my way!"

He started, but Harry sprung back a step and leveled a weapon at him.

Broadway Billy had instructed his team never to use a weapon unless nothing else would do, and Happy Harry considered this just that kind of a case.

The man recoiled from before the weapon, his face growing white, but his keen, snake-like eyes flashed with rage, and without speaking he fixed his gaze steadily upon the boy who confronted him.

Seth Marten, too, had drawn a weapon, and with his back against the door to prevent the man's escape, he watched the conflict between the two with keen interest. There was something in the eyes of the man that made Seth feel numb, impassive.

And if that was so with Seth, how fared it with Harry, upon whom the old intruder's gaze was fixed steadily?

The man's manner was like that of a snake when trying to charm its prey, and in a few seconds Harry's eyes appeared to grow glazed, and his arm with the weapon began to fall.

Seth waited to see no more; but, fearful lest he might be brought under some baleful spell or influence, he opened the door and glided out into the hall.

This was not cowardice, but prudence.

Allowing himself to be thrown into the condition in which he had seen his partner falling, of what use would he be to protect his employer's interests?

No sooner out than he darted down the stairs, having put away his weapon, and, as he ran, he adjusted a mustache to his lip and made such changes in his appearance as were possible.

Reaching the street, he crossed to the opposite side and waited.

He could have wounded the man, but Broadway Billy had given the strictest orders against that.

Never, he had instructed him and Harry, must they actually shoot unless to save their own lives. Seth's life had certainly been in no danger here.

Meantime it was faring ill with Harry. Lower dropped his arm, until it hung nerveless at his side, and he was as utterly helpless as he well could be.

"Now, sir, sit down!" the little old man ordered.

Harry obeyed promptly.

"And now see that you do not get up from there for an hour, sir. Ha! where is the other rascal?"

He looked around for Seth, whose silent exit he had not noticed, and was surprised not to find him there. But, he did not look for him.

"Gone to bring a policeman, perhaps," he said to himself. "Well, he will have to be lively to find me here when he comes back, I can tell him that. They do not know Doctor Dray, I guess. Ha, ha, ha!"

He took another hasty look around the office, particularly about the desk, but finding nothing more he wanted, hastened to get away.

Opening the door, he looked out, and seeing the way clear, hurried out and down to the street.

He made no stop there, but cast one swift look around to find Seth.

"He will not find me when he gets his policeman," he said to himself. Ha! they cannot cope with Doctor Dray. They never could. I have the papers, and they do not know who I am. How lucky that I happened to think they might be there!"

He chuckled to himself, rubbing his hands in a delighted way.

"The silver casket will be found now," he communed. "I have the clew at last. Tommy has had it in hiding all these years, and his reason has just returned sufficiently for him to unearth it. I found him poring over the half of the peculiar chart, and the thought came to me immediately that he had lost the other half at the office of that young detective. Ah! I am wide awake for them—too wide awake, as they will find."

Again he chuckled, almost laughed outright, rubbing his hands the more, fairly hugging himself, as it were.

"And, lucky for me I happened there when I did, too," he further cogitated. "From what the boy said, the detective had not seen the papers yet. That is strange, too; I can't understand that, for Gaddas said he was there in person when Tommy was there. But, if he has not seen them, so much the better, and especially if he has not seen the other half of the chart. That would no doubt have filled him with desire to unravel the mystery. But, I have the best of them all around, for they will never know who their visitor was. Ha, ha, ha!"

Could he have known the Silent Shadower was even then upon his track he would not have felt so sure of his game.

Seth had been gone from the office something like twenty minutes or half an hour when Broadway Billy returned, and on entering found Happy Harry in the same position in which the doctor had left him.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy ejaculated. "What's been going on here, Harry?"

Happy Harry neither moved nor spoke, nor showed by any sign whatever that he heard. There he sat, bolt upright and staring straight ahead, his arm with the revolver in his grasp hanging idly by his side. His face was almost expressionless, and Billy was alarmed.

The young detective noted everything at once; the absence of Seth, and the fact that Harry had drawn his revolver for some purpose or other.

He knew that something very out of the ordinary had been taking place in his absence.

Stepping forward, he gave Harry a hasty inspection.

He had half-feared he might be dead, or badly hurt, but finding he was neither, gave him a hearty shaking to arouse him.

"Come! Harry! Rouse up, here!" he cried.

"What's the matter with you?"

Harry came out of his stupor with a start, and leaping to his feet, looked eagerly around, as if in search of some one, holding his weapon ready for action if needed.

"Who are you looking for?" Billy demanded.

"What has been going on here? Where is Seth?"

"Where is that old codger?" asked Harry.

"What old codger?"

"Why that wrinkled old man that took the papers away."

"What papers, Harry? What are you talking about? Are you in your right mind?"

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Harry. "I don't know whether I am or not, and that's the truth. I've been knocked out, bad."

"Well, tell me about it."

"Didn't you see Seth?"

"No."

"Then I hope he's after that imp of Satan. Crackers an' cheese! he looked at me till I was clean gone, and that's the last I remember about it. Never saw such a pair of eyes in my life."

"You have been mesmerized!" Billy decided, at once.

"I've had something done to me, and that's a fact. I feel creepy yet. But, let me tell you all about it."

"That is what I have been trying to lead you to do. You can wait a few moments, however, until you get your grip again. This beats anything we have ever run up against I take it."

"I should say it does!" admitted the boy.

He waited a few moments to pull himself together, so to say, when he launched forth to explain what had taken place.

He told about the coming of Mr. Tilford Millard, the lawyer, with the batch of papers, and what that gentleman had said. Then he stated what the papers were, so far as he and Seth had ascertained.

Particular stress was laid upon the mysterious diagram, chart, or map, which had been found in part, in which Billy was keenly interested. After that Harry related all about the coming of the little old man, and his claiming the papers as his and carrying them off.

Billy paid close attention to everything, and saw that Harry had been overcome by the power of mesmerism, for but for that he would have carried his point and held the mysterious old man prisoner till his, Billy's, arrival. The absence of Silent Seth, however, went far to reassure him that the trail was not a lost one, for he believed the Silent Shadower had followed the old man away.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY HEARS THE HEARN STORY.

"You couldn't help it, Harry," Billy said, when the boy had told him everything. "The old man had one gun too many for you, so don't take it to heart so. You will get a chance to square the account with him later on, I guess."

"I hope I will, anyhow," responded Harry. "But, what do you make out of it, hoss? What right had the old codger to the papers? And how did he know they were here, anyhow? I knew he lied when he said you told him they were here, for you didn't know it yourself."

"Of course he lied, Harry. As to who he is,

I don't know; but I suspect it was some one from that insane asylum—maybe Doctor Dray himself."

"Crackers an' cheese! What makes you think that?"

"No one else is interested, so far as I know, and they are the only ones who are aware the old luny was here. Still, I may be mistaken. You would know the man again, if you saw him, of course."

"You bet!"

"That is good. Oh! we shall have them yet if the wheels stay on, unless they prove too many for us."

"I'd like to know about that little silver coffin, wouldn't you? What do you think of the paper I told you about with all the pictures and funny jiggers on it? What d'ye s'pose it is?"

"I suspect it is a map to indicate the hiding-place of the casket."

"Christopher Columbial That was just what Seth and I said. I'd like to know whether Seth held fast to it or not."

"Ha! is there a chance that he did, and that the old man did not carry it off?" asked Billy, quickly.

"Yes; for Seth folded it up when the door opened, but I didn't see where he put it. I hope he stuck it in his pocket."

"So do I, for I want to see it. Still, the chances are that he laid it down upon the other papers, for he could never suspect they would be carried off."

Thus they talked till, finally, Billy declared his intention of going to see Lawyer Millard. Leaving Harry at the office, with instructions to detain Seth if he came back, he set out.

Arriving at the lawyer's office, he was fortunate in finding him in, and disengaged.

They were strangers to each other, but Billy quickly made himself known, and stated the business which had brought him there.

"Then you did not know anything about the papers?" the lawyer asked, in much surprise. "I supposed you must, from the fact that your name was on the packet, though it puzzled me to know how they had come here."

"Under what circumstances were they found?" asked Billy.

"The most peculiar, sir. I had business out for a little while yesterday afternoon, and when I came back I found the documents lying here on my desk."

"The door was open during your absence, then?"

"Not so, for had it been there would then have been nothing so peculiar about it. The door was locked."

"Well, it is strange, very. Who has a key besides yourself?"

"No one, sir; I carry the only one."

Billy was thoughtful.

The matter was no great puzzle to him, knowing what he did, but he did not want to reveal his hand too readily.

"It is a strange matter," he remarked. "My office-boy told me that you let fall the remark that this office used to be occupied by a Mr. Hearn. May I inquire what Mr. Hearn that was?"

"It was Mr. Ruford Hearn, sir. Your office-boy, too, by the way, said something to lead me to believe that you were interested in some matters pertaining to the Hearns or their estate, and that naturally confirmed my thought that you must know something about the papers."

"What did the boy tell you?"

Billy wanted to know his ground before pushing ahead.

"Why, to the effect that the Hearn case, whatever it was, had taken possession of you, and he said you were out upon it then."

"Exactly; and now I will tell you something about it. Are you acquainted with a Miss Jane Hearn, an elderly maiden lady who lives at No. —— street?"

"Why, sir, she is Ruford Hearn's daughter, and that is where he used to reside. I know of her, but nothing more. Have never seen her since the case was in the courts, years ago."

"You were then her counsel?"

"Not so; I was working for the interests of her half-brother and sister, Ruford Hearn, Junior, and Anne—now a Mrs. Atwall."

"Do you mind telling me all about that matter?" Billy asked.

"Certainly not, sir. It is an old story, and has nearly passed out of mind, but I'll rake it together and give it to you, for I begin to see that you have an interest in it somewhere."

"I believe I have."

"Well, here it is, as I recall it: Mr. Ruford Hearn was a man of considerable means, a very

eccentric fellow, and perhaps, as some thought, partly crazy at times. Be that as it may, it is certain that he was queer, to say the least. He was an architect and builder, and this room was his office for many years.

"Ruford Hearn was twice married. By his first wife he had a son and a daughter, the two I have just mentioned. By the second he had three other children; Hugh, Jane and Susan. The latter became a Mrs. Muster. At the time of his death all these were away from home, except Jane, and I suppose it was just as well, for he died of a contagious fever.

"When his will was brought to light it was found that the children by the second wife had received all of his property, while those by the first had been cut off with a trivial sum, just enough to debar them from breaking the will. Nevertheless, as it was so well known that Mr. Hearn had been of partly unsound mind for years, the case was carried to the courts, where, in the interest of the brother and sister by the first wife, I did succeed in winning a percentage from each of the other heirs, but only a trivial sum compared to what they should have received justly.

"There you have it sir; not much of a story after all."

"Do you know the addresses of these several heirs?" Billy inquired.

"Not now, sir; I did have them, but of course so many years have passed that they may be dead."

"Will you give me their old addresses?"

"I will if I can find them, which is doubtful. I will see."

Above the lawyer's desk was a great set of letter-boxes with different dates upon each.

Running his fingers along these till he came to the one whose date indicated twenty-one years past, he opened it, taking out the papers it contained.

"Ha! here they are," he said. "I have proved the value of this system in a thousand instances, and here it is proven again. I remember the year, you see, and here are the papers."

He read off the names and addresses, Billy taking notes of them as he did so.

"Ha!" the lawyer presently exclaimed, "this paper reminds me of something else regarding the matter. Strange that it should have slipped my mind at all. About the time the will matter was settled by the courts there arose a new sensation regarding the affair."

"What was that?"

"Why, a personage appeared on the scene who declared that he was Ruford Hearn, not dead at all!"

"That was rather remarkable, was it not? Upon what grounds did he set up his claim? This case grows interesting as you proceed."

"Well, I'll tell you about that, too. The will was not settled in a day, you understand, but it dragged on for a matter of four years after the death of Ruford Hearn. When this man appeared, nearly five years had elapsed. .

"The man was an older man than Mr. Hearn, for one thing, and much thinner in person. There was a slight resemblance, but that was all. He came with no proofs, but simply declared himself to be Ruford Hearn. He talked wildly about a silver coffin, and a secret, and it soon became apparent that he was deranged.

"None of the children could say it was Mr. Hearn, and the three of the second wife were positive it was not; as in fact it could not be, since Hearn had been dead and buried for so long, a fact well enough known to all. Finally, diligent search having been made, it was discovered that he was a harmless lunatic named Brown—I believe it was Brown, who had been for a matter of ten years or more an inmate of a private asylum in this city."

"That exploded the bubble, then."

"Certainly."

"But, what theory was advanced to explain what had put so strange an idea into the crazy man's head?"

"Why, it was said that he was passionately fond of newspapers, and it was not the first time he had believed himself to be some one else, a person whose name he had often seen in print, generally."

"That seemed reasonable, of course."

"Quite reasonable. During one political campaign, for instance, he came to believe that he was a candidate for the Presidency, so it was shown, and he carried on quite a lively campaign in the institution among his fellow lunatics."

"Enough, certainly. And of course his claim was all in the wind, after that, eh?"

"There had been no bottom to it before, for his wild talk about a silver coffin had stamped

him a lunatic at the outset. Oh, no; there was nothing to it, for all knew Hearn was dead."

"If he had been Hearn, of course the children would have known him at sight, in spite of the time."

"Exactly; especially his daughter Jane, who had been his housekeeper for years. And so with Hugh and Susan, who had seen him often. The other two, however, had seen less of him and so could not take oath."

"They had a doubt, then?"

"At first they expressed doubts, but were speedily convinced."

"What was your own opinion?"

"You have had it."

The lawyer's opinion, then, had been the same as that of the others. He had taken no stock in the story the crazy man had told.

"I suppose your sympathies in the matter of the will were with the son and daughter of the first marriage, were they not?" Billy questioned, endeavoring to make doubly sure of his ground.

"Decidedly, sir," declared Mr. Millard, emphatically. "Even at this late day, Mr. Weston, were I to discover anything that would balance that account more in favor of my clients I would go for the others at once. To tell you the truth, I did not like them, not one of them."

CHAPTER VIII.

SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.

BROADWAY BILLY had gained his point. He now knew that he might trust Lawyer Millard fully, and resolved that he would do so.

Already he knew more about the case than the lawyer himself, and while there was plenty of room for him to be mistaken, yet he fully believed that Ruford Hearn was still living, and that crazy Tommy Brown was the man.

"But," the lawyer immediately added, remindingly, "you have not told me what you set out to tell; that is, what your interest in the Hearn matter is."

"True enough, so I haven't," acknowledged Billy. "I'll tell you now. This morning a woman came to my office to engage me to recover some papers which had been stolen from her house."

"Papers?"

"Yes, sir; and that woman was Jane Hearn."

"The deuce you say! Young man, were these the papers—these I found here?"

"Undoubtedly they were, sir, but I have not seen them yet, so cannot be sure on that point. I have every reason to believe they were the same."

"You have not seen the papers? This seems to grow stranger each moment. I do not understand it, now, at all. You have not seen the papers, yet my leaving them at your office has brought you here."

"You understand it all right," reassured Billy. "The fact is, you see, my boy told me all about the papers, or as much as he knew about them, but they had been taken from my office by force before I arrived there, which accounts for the fact that I have not seen them."

"This begins to savor of mystery, Mr. Weston."

"I should say it does. How, think you, were these papers stolen from the Hearn residence, and how brought here and put in your office, when in both instances the doors were locked?"

"I am puzzled. Were I a believer in spooks I might suspect there has been something superhuman about it. As I am not, however, I must simply give it up. This sort of thing is more in your line. What do you make of it?"

"What would you say were I to tell you I believe Ruford Hearn is alive?"

The lawyer sprung to his feet in excitement, supporting himself by one hand on his desk, and stared at Billy for a moment blankly.

"You cannot believe anything so absurd as that!" he cried.

"Sit down and let's consider it from that point of view," said Billy. "We will see how it looks, anyhow."

The lawyer resumed his seat and awaited for Billy to speak.

"Did you look at the papers before you brought them to my office?" Billy made inquiry.

"I did, sir. I naturally would, finding them here on my own private desk in the manner in which I did."

"Certainly. Did you notice the one—rather part of one—which was a sort of map, chart, or drawing?"

"Yes, yes."

"You noted the coffin upon it?"

"Yes, yes, yes. What in heaven's name is back of this?"

"Let's look at it carefully, and perhaps we

shall be able to find out. Now, first to consider, these papers relate to Hearn affairs. They were taken from the residence of Ruford Hearn in a mysterious manner. Second, they were brought to this office, which formerly belonged to Ruford Hearn, and were put in here on your desk in as mysterious a manner as they were taken from the house. Do you see anything remarkable in this?"

"Yes, yes. Go on, go on."

"You have told me that the crazy man, Brown, who claimed to be Ruford Hearn, talked about a silver coffin and a secret. Here, on one of these documents, you found the drawing of a coffin. You have said Mr. Hearn was an architect, and he would be just the person to make such a drawing. I did not see the paper, you understand, but I judge by what my boy has said that it was well executed. Here, then, we have some strong points in favor of the theory I advance. I believe Ruford Hearn is alive, and that it was he who took the papers from the house and left them here."

"But, it's impossible!" cried the lawyer. "Even if living he would be a very old man now, and incapable of doing it. But, he has been dead for years, there is no doubt of that. The doctor, the undertaker, and his own daughter, all gave ample proof on that point."

"And how about the crazy man, Brown?"

"I suppose he must be dead, too."

"Well, I happen to know that he is not dead, Mr. Millard."

"You do? What do you know about him? Is there any end to your knowledge in this matter?"

"Yes, and the end is reached only too soon. I wish I knew a good deal more about it. I took the matter up out of mere curiosity at first, and now my curiosity has got the better of me. I must push on whether I would or not."

"But, how do you know Brown is living?"

"He was at my office yesterday."

"At your office?" in astonishment. "What was he doing there?"

"He came to see me on business; and that business was—to establish his identity as Ruford Hearn."

"Wonder of wonders! What is coming of this, young man? Do you really and seriously believe that this man is Ruford Hearn—that he can be Ruford Hearn?"

"I do, most assuredly, Mr. Willard."

"Then you must have some further proof."

"What leads you to that conclusion?"

"I know detectives are slow to come to positive conclusions, sir."

"Well, yes, I have further proof. I will lay it before you, since we seem to have been thrown together in this matter. This man Brown is eighty-three years old, and the inmate of an asylum kept by one Dr. Dray—"

"Dray! That was the name of the doctor who figured in the affair at first. I remember it."

"So much the stronger the case, then. The old man came to my office clad in a suit of boyish clothes, and had his pockets bulging with marbles. He was crazy, no question about that, yet there was method in his madness withal. For a brief time I know he was quite rational. He declared his true name was Ruford Hearn, and he wanted to engage me to restore to his wronged heirs a fortune out of which they had been cheated."

"This is simply amazing, Mr. Weston."

"He wanted me to find a silver coffin, which, he said, contains valuable papers. He gave me an idea where it is, declaring he had never told anybody before, but said he felt he could trust me. But, his mind wandered, and while he declared himself to be Ruford Hearn, he at the same time averred that he was dead and buried. It was impossible for him to tell a connected story, but he did tell enough to satisfy me that he is indeed the supposed dead man. He said he died twenty-two years ago; that he had been a rich man, and had a family of two sons and three daughters, one son and one daughter by his first wife and the others by his second. You see, sir, it tallies exactly."

"It certainly does."

"That is not all. As I said, he had a pocketful of marbles, and presently, when his mind wandered more, he became the same as a little boy and wanted to play at marbles, and in order to humor him I allowed one of my office-boys to play with him. They played for a little while, the game finally ending in a squabble, and about that time a young man from the asylum came to take him away—"

"And you made known to him what the old man had said—"

"Well, hardly, sir. I have cut my eye-teeth,

if you will excuse me for saying so myself. But, as I was going to say, you see I had a good chance to see the marbles, and while I thought nothing of them at the time, their kind and color became fixed upon my mind. Well, when Jane Hearn came to me this morning with her case, she had a clew to the robber in the shape of a marble which she had picked up on the floor in the hall, and it was exactly like some of those the crazy man had had. Now, adding it up, what is the sum you get?"

"By heavens, sir, there may be something in it!"

"There certainly is something in it, as we are bound to discover. I came here for the purpose of learning all about the life of Ruford Hearn, and as you unfolded it to me I was sure there was no mistake. Be the explanation what it may, Mr. Millard, I believe it is certain that this crazy man Brown and Ruford Hearn are one and the same, and that Ruford Hearn never died as it was said of him. That he died of a dangerous fever is another point to be considered, in the light of all the other evidence we have."

"You are right, young man, you are right. You must look into this matter further, and if you discover that you are right in what you suspect—"

"Then, what?"

"Then we will make it hot for the knaves, that is all. Let me get hold of proof for what you suspect is so, and if I won't put them in a sweat-box it will be funny, that is all."

"The proof will be forthcoming; I am sure of it."

"But, you said the papers had been taken from the office? Who do you suppose took them? But, of course you know that."

"No, I do not know, but I at first suspected it was Doctor Dray, and now I suspect him all the more. It was a little, withered old fellow, and he mesmerized my office-boy in order to carry out his scheme, showing that he was master of magic as well as of lunatics."

"The rascal! But, he having the papers, you have nothing to work on. What can you do?"

"There are plenty of directions in which to begin work, sir. I'll have the papers back again unless he puts them out of the way by destroying them. And it is not likely he will do that."

"Possibly not."

"One other point, sir: I want the name of that undertaker who had a hand in this affair at the time of Hearn's supposed death."

"You shall have it."

The lawyer turned again to the papers he had taken from the letter-box, and the name was soon learned.

"His name was Peter Fryers," said the lawyer, "and his place of business was then at No. — street. Whether he is living or dead now, I cannot say."

"I can find out. Meantime, do not say a word to any one concerning this affair. If it turns out as I think it will, I'll put the proofs into your hands and you can then give them the scorching they deserve."

Broadway Billy took his leave, going back again to his office, where, to his surprise, he found the woman, Jane Hearn, awaiting his coming. The truth flashed upon him at sight of her, and he knew her errand before she opened her mouth.

CHAPTER IX.

GOING FOR PROOF POSITIVE.

PURPOSELY, the young detective showed some surprise at seeing the woman, and she hastened to make known her business.

"I see you are surprised to see me again so soon, sir," she said, "but I have come to tell you the papers have been found and that you need not give the matter any further attention."

"Ha! so they have been found, have they?" observed Billy. "I suppose it was as I hinted, that you had mislaid them yourself and forgotten where you had put them. Am I not right? You see, it was simply impossible for any one to have gained admission into the house when it was locked as it was."

The woman's face lighted, and in her eyes Billy could read triumph.

"You are nearly right, sir," she declared. "The papers were not taken, but I had not put them away not knowing where; I am not so crazy as that yet, thank goodness. You see, sir, they had slipped out over the back part of the drawer and fallen down into the body of the desk. I happened to think of that after you had gone, and on looking, there I found them."

"Quite wonderful; and you were fortunate. I

was sure they were in the house somewhere, madam. Allow me to congratulate you."

"Yes, I was lucky, and I feel ashamed for all the trouble I have made for you."

"Do not mention it, madam."

"But, how much do I owe you, sir? I will pay you, of course."

"You owe me nothing, madam. Since you had no case, it having been all a mistake, I will charge you nothing."

"Well, I am greatly obliged to you, I am sure. Of course you will give the matter no further thought. I am sorry now that I troubled you at all. And I am ever so much obliged."

She took her leave, and Billy turned to Harry to find him standing with a forefinger pressed against the side of his nose and one eye closed.

"Well, what do you see?" asked Billy.

"She must think we don't know green from red," answered the boy, "to come here with such a yarn as that."

"Then you don't believe she has found the papers at all? If that is so, what brought her here?"

"To call off the dogs, of course!"

"I see you catch on, Harry; that certainly was her object. There is a good deal back of this, and that was the reason I let her think she was closing my eyes. We are going to yank this skeleton out to the light if it takes a leg."

"You bet we are! The jeebeeb hath spoken. Selah! That old codger that got the papers here has put her up to snuff, and she thinks she has sprinkled some of it in our eyes. She's left, bad. She hadn't anything to say about the marble this time, had she?"

"You see it all, Harry; no need to make a map of it for you. What had she to say before I got here?"

"She wormed for points, bad, but I didn't know anything. She must 'a' tho't I hadn't brains enough to sort rags in a junk-shop—an' I dunno but she was right."

"You played it well, Harry. I can trust you to do your part in any case that turns up, I guess."

"After the way I allowed that old fellow to get away with the papers—"

"That was something you could not help, Harry. Now, we can do nothing more till we hear from Silent Seth— Ha! here he is!"

The door opened and the Silent Shadower came in.

A glance at Billy and Harry told him that Harry had made known all that had taken place, so Seth came right to the point.

"I know where the papers are," he said. "I followed the man until he parted with 'em, and then I came here to report. He left them at No. — street."

"Bet your boots he did!" cried Harry, with delight. "We guessed it, didn't we boss?—that is to say, you did. Seth, my deaf an' dumb pard, we have got onto this thing as big as an ox, and we are going to make Rome howl, yes shriek!"

Seth looked at Billy questioningly.

"It is so, Seth," Billy declared. "We felt sure of it, but that does not detract from the good stroke of work you have done. You bring us proof for our suspicions. You have done well, and I am proud of you. But, tell us all you know. Did you learn who the old man was?"

"I suspect he's Doctor Dray, for I followed him first to the asylum. He went in there, and while I was waiting to consider what to do he came out again in a hurry and made off to the Hearn house. He had the papers in his hand all the way, and when he came out of the house he hadn't them, so I concluded he had left them there and I came here."

"Not at once, though."

"No; I followed the man back to the asylum first, and then jumped a car."

"I thought so. If you had come direct you would have got here ahead of the woman. She has been here to call off the dogs, as Harry says."

"And she came with the biggest kind of a lie, too," added Happy Harry, to let Seth into the whole matter. "She said the papers had been found behind the desk. Oh! it don't take a seer to see through the little game, you bet."

"But, it will take some work to show the scheme up," declared Billy, "and it may give us trouble before we are done with it. The most important thing to be considered just now, however, I take it, is dinner. What do you boys say to that suggestion?"

The remainder of the day was spent by Billy and his team in looking up the members of the Hearn family; that is, the children of Ruford Hearn.

All were found, and living in the city. Jane, as we have seen, was well off, and so were her brother and sister, Hugh Hearn and Mrs. Muster. The half-brother and sister, on the other hand, were poor.

All were well on in years, the youngest being fifty, at the least, and their descendants were numerous. Ruford Hearn, Jr., had grandchildren grown, as had also his sister. It was to these two that Billy gave particular attention, to judge for himself respecting the estimate the lawyer had made.

That business done, Broadway Billy met Lawyer Millard by appointment.

The whole ground was gone over at length, and the lawyer agreed with Billy in his view of the matter. Indeed, he could not well do otherwise.

"And now regarding this peculiar chart," said Billy, taking from his pocket the half of the mysterious map which he had got from Silent Seth. "I believe this has some likeness to the plan of the Hearn house."

"You think so?"

"I certainly do. And, I think, it is the plan of that library from which the woman said the papers had been stolen."

"More likely to be that than any other room in the house, I should say. But, of what use is it to us without the other half? We can make nothing out of it."

"Half a loaf is better than no bread," reminded Billy. "We'll make the most we can of it and trust to luck for the rest. We must get into that house somehow and investigate."

"But, how?"

"We'll think about that later. For the present I have something more important on hand."

"What's that?"

"We want positive proof whether Ruford Hearn is living or dead. Not that I am doubtful about it myself, but we must have the best of proof to make out a case that will stand the test."

"Well?"

"To go to the cemetery and open the coffin will give us the proof."

"Ha! that is so. But, are you not afraid, in case the report was true, that you may take the disease?"

"After all these years? Hardly. I am going myself; I do not ask you to go along. But, upon this will hinge the whole case. If there is a body in that coffin, then my case will be weakened."

"And if not—"

"If not, then I'll get there with both feet."

"And, if I cannot help you at this, what can I do, Mr. Weston? You have only to direct me."

"You can help me, Mr. Millard. I want to tackle that cemetery armed with the proper sort of warrant of search, and you can help me to go get just what is needed."

"Yes, I can do that, and will."

"And that is all I will ask of you. I'll have a story to tell you to-morrow, I rather think."

"But, even if you get the warrant, how will you get into the vault at night? A warrant won't unlock the doors for you, will it?"

"Once I get the warrant I'll go to the office of the cemetery people and command their co-operation in the matter. And I'll go to-night in order to save time on the case, you see."

Leaving the chart, or plan, with the lawyer for safe-keeping for the time being, seeing it put away in the safe, Billy and the lawyer next went to the office of a notary where the necessary paper was taken out, and there they parted; Billy promising to see Millard again at ten next morning.

Billy went straight to the office of the cemetery company.

When he had made himself known, and had stated his business sufficiently, he was given the required help.

A letter to the superintendent of the grounds placed the vault at his disposal, and he apprehended no further difficulty in that direction. The proof once in his possession, the rest would be easy.

He made no stop in his preparations until he had seen the superintendent and every arrangement for the unenviable nocturnal business had been made complete. A man was supplied, one of the oldest employees of the cemetery, and it was after dark when the venture was made.

Billy and his team—Harry and Seth, and the cemetery man, made up the company.

"Faith, and it's an uncanny business for the night," the old employee complained as they made their way to the vaults.

"It is a business that could not be done by day," explained Billy, "for it has to be done

very secretly in order that it may not be known to the rascals we want to trap."

"Well-a, well-a, I suppose it is all right, and it is all one to me. Night or day, I can lay my hand on any slab in this whole place, young man, and tell you who it covers. And as for the Hearn vault, I don't believe it has been opened these twenty years. I mind well when the old man Hearn was laid away— Ah! here it is."

CHAPTER X.

THE SILVER COFFIN DISCOVERED.

RUFORD HEARN, the architect, had had his own ideas regarding what was the proper thing in vaults.

This place, where he was believed to be asleep with his fathers, had been of his own designing, and was about as simple and plain as can be imagined.

It was marked by a marble pyramid, several feet in height, consisting of four layers of marble and a cap stone. The earth was sloped up to the base of it, and on one side was a cut.

This cut, or leveled pathway, led to an iron door, which was under the base of the pyramid. The door was secured with a very heavy lock, the key to which was in the possession of the family. There was a duplicate, however, held by the superintendent of the cemetery.

This key the man with Billy carried in his hand, and as he broke off suddenly in his conversation he banged with the key on the iron door.

"Hold on a moment before you open it," Billy commanded. "You were just saying you remember when the old man Hearn was put in here."

"Yes, I do that, sir."

"What kind of a funeral did he have?"

"Faith, it was no funeral at all, sir. He was brought here and put in, and that was the all of it."

"What was the reason for that?"

"He died of some ketchin' ailment, sir. He was brought in a dead-wagon, with only two men aboard of it, and a kerridge behind with only a man and woman as mourners."

"Did you help put the coffin in here?"

"I did that. It was hefty, and as they told me it was sealed and there was no danger, I took a hand with them and we boosted it in, and here it has been ever since."

"All right; go ahead and open the door."

Billy was not greatly encouraged by these reports, for it appeared that Mr. Hearn had either really died of a dread disease, or the scheme had been carried out to the very last act. That, however, was nothing to discourage his suspicions.

The detective furnished the light, having a bull's-eye in hand, and the old man began fumbling at the lock with the great key, while Billy and his boys looked on expectantly.

At first he could make no headway at all, for the key would not go in, but at last it went in, when it was found that it would not turn. The old man, however, was prepared for that.

He had brought along a little oil, and blowing some of it into the old lock, a few minutes' work had it open.

"There we are!" he said. "And now step back out of the way and allow the air to freshen the place up a bit and we'll go in. Of all ill smells, the breath of a vault is the worst."

Billy and the boys drew back, and the old man tugging the door open upon its rusty hinges, followed their example.

They waited several minutes, to allow the fresh air time to disinfect the place; then they all entered.

A square chamber was revealed, on two sides of which were sarcophagi.

Billy stopped and looked at these coffins for a moment, after which he inquired which was the right one.

The cemetery man indicated it, and while he, Happy Harry and Silent Seth stood by, the latter with something of a feeling of awe, Billy played the light of his lantern upon the top of the receptacle.

"Yes, this is it," he agreed. "Here are the initials. Now, to lift the lid from this stone chest. Do you think we can do it?"

"I guess the four of us can make a good try of it, anyhow," answered the old attendant.

Billy put down his lantern and all took hold for the effort.

It was a heavy lift, but the lid was raised and gradually taken off and laid at one side.

Within the sarcophagus was discovered a coffin, to which time had done little damage, it

having been protected from the air, and on a plate on the coffin was the name—

RUFORD HEARN."

"Now for it!" said Billy. "Hold the light, and I'll open the thing and we will see how Mr. Hearn is getting along."

The old man took the light, and with a screw-driver Billy proceeded to loosen the screws in the coffin-lid preparatory to removing it and disclosing the ghastly contents to view.

Not accustomed to that line of business, he was rather slow at it, but at last the final screw was lifted and the lid could be taken off.

"Get your grip on your nerves, now," Billy cautioned.

"I've got it," declared Harry. "Let the curtain go up."

He spoke more bravely than he felt, just then, it may be surmised. As for Seth, he said nothing, as usual.

Billy took a firm hold upon the coffin-lid, and after an effort or two it came off, when a sight met their gaze which caused them to recoil in horror for the moment.

To Broadway Billy and his team it was a sight unexpected.

There, in the coffin, was the yellowed face of an old man, looking simply hideous in the glare of the light, and even as they looked the skin began to fall and the dust to crumble away from the bones, leaving naught but a grinning skeleton for them to look upon.

We have said it was a sight unexpected by Billy and the boys, because they had been led to believe they should find the coffin filled with stones or some heavy material, having the proof they had that Ruford Hearn was still living.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the old man of the cemetery, to whom this was no new sight, evidently; "what makes ye start back so? Are you skart, boys?"

"It was rather startling," admitted Billy, "when nothing of the sort was looked for. This puts a damper upon my theory, and a bad one, too. I expected to find this coffin full of bricks."

"Bricks! What an idea!"

"A mighty wrong idea, it seems."

Billy replaced the lid and set down the screws.

While he did so his mind was busy, and an idea came to him as he worked.

"Will you allow me to say something, boss?"

Silent Seth asked, when Billy was nearly done.

"Certainly," was the prompt leave.

"Christopher Columbia, yes!" cried Harry. "It isn't often you speak of your own accord, Seth, and when you want to do so you ought to have the floor."

"Yet he doesn't always get it when you are around," Billy suggested.

"Enough said," Harry closed up.

"A thought has come to me, that is all," now spoke Seth. "Here are three other stone boxes, and if they really wanted to make a mystery of it wouldn't they have put the empty coffin into some other box than the one bearing the initials?"

"You have hit it," decided Billy. "That is the very thought I have been trying all this time to get through my hair. I believe that is the secret of it."

"You are mistaken, though," spoke up the old man. "As I said, I had a hand in bringing the coffin in here, and this is the box we put it in."

"Besides, there is the plate on the coffin," argued Harry.

"All of which is good," continued Billy, "but it would not be much work to come here and change coffins from one box to the other and change the plate. We'll see what there is in the idea, anyhow."

Having secured the lid, they lifted the stone cover back to its place and Billy examined the other sarcophagi.

"It's impossible to tell who is who," he mused, "so we'll make a guess as to which one they would naturally make the exchange from, and I'll say this one. You see its position would make it handy for the work to be done."

He indicated one with his foot.

"That's so," admitted the old servitor of the cemetery.

"Then we'll off with the lid and see whether we have struck upon the truth or not."

Again the light was put down and they bent their strength to the lift, and the lid was taken off and laid aside as the other had been.

Here was another coffin, and at sight of it the young detective uttered an exclamation, for upon it was no plate, but the marks were plain to be seen where one had been.

"This is it, beans to buttons!" avowed Harry. "I believe it is," agreed Billy. "Anyhow, we'll soon know."

The old man holding the light as before, Billy set at work to take out the screws, and in a few minutes the upper part of the lid was removed.

"Ha!" cried Billy. "We have struck oil this time!"

The coffin was filled with bricks, between and around which were wrappings and stuffings of rags and paper!

"You hit it, Seth, sure," cried Happy Harry, executing a fling on the stone floor. "You had something to say that time when you spoke, sure enough."

Broadway Billy was busily examining the contents of the coffin. He had removed several of the bricks, enough to convince himself that the upper part of the receptacle for the dead contained nothing else.

Next, he removed the screws from the lower half and removed that, but at the first glance nothing but bricks was to be discerned. Removing some of them, however, he came to something else.

This something else was an object wrapped in a cloth, and which was in the shape of a tiny coffin!

"The silver coffin!" cried Happy Harry at once.

Silent Seth was eager, but he was as imperturbable as ever. Nothing, it seemed, could excite him.

Even Billy himself marveled at his impassiveness, for his own impatience was great to remove the cloth to learn what was within.

Dropping to the floor, he made haste to remove it, and there sure enough was the little silver coffin! black with age, almost, but unmistakably the object indicated upon the paper chart.

"We have got it!" cried Billy. "The victory is ours, and nothing remains but to unmask the villains and right the wrong that has been done. Never a word of this night's work, old man," to the cemetery employee, "till the case has been ended and you are given leave to speak."

Wrapping the mysterious object up again, Billy gave it to Seth to hold while he replaced the bricks and closed the coffin up as he had found it.

CHAPTER XI.

CALLING OUT THE BRIGADE.

As nearly as possible everything was arranged as it had been found, and the four prepared to take their leave from the vault.

Broadway Billy took pains to conceal the fact that any one had been there, but it was impossible to hide all evidence. There was, for one thing, the oil on the lock, proof that it had been opened.

Still, he had little reason to believe that any one would suspect a visit to this reposing place of the dead, since it was clear enough that no one had ever dreamed the little silver casket was there. Besides, he had acted so promptly in the matter that it was hardly probable any one could have knowledge of his movements.

He had not yet, however, correctly estimated the villains with whom he had to deal.

When they were ready Billy took charge of the little silver coffin himself and they filed out from the vault, the old man stopping to lock the door, Billy holding the light so he could see.

That done, the light was turned off and they filed out from the dismal place to the main pathway.

Here they met with a sudden surprise and attack.

Without the least warning several men suddenly set upon them, and they were severely dealt with.

Broadway Billy received the first blow, one that sent him senseless to the ground, and the old employee of the cemetery was sent to follow him speedily. Harry and Seth sprung bravely into the fight, but their help was useless.

It was soon over, and quiet reigned.

The next Happy Harry knew it was broad daylight, and he came to, to find himself lying between two graves.

There was a soreness about his head; and feeling with his hand he found a lump on his cranium as big as an egg. He had been knocked senseless, and unconsciousness had followed.

"Christopher Columbia!" he exclaimed, sitting up and rubbing his eyes open wide. "Here has been a pretty go, sure as scissors. What have they done with Billy and Seth, I wonder? And what has become of the silver coffin? Who was in that gang, anyhow?"

But for the soreness in his head he was all right, as he soon found, and having got upon his feet and recovered his hat, he looked around for indications of his missing companions.

There were evidences of the fray, and some marks of blood, but neither Broadway Billy, Silent Seth, nor the old man of the cemetery, was to be found.

Nor was the silver coffin anywhere around.

"Crackers an' cheese!" ejaculated Harry. "They have done us up bad this time, and no mistake about it. They took us when we wasn't lookin', and we got dumped. I wonder where the boss and the Philosopher are. And where's that silver coffin? Reckon they have gobbled up that sure enough. And what am I going to do?"

He had acquired Billy's habits of scratching his head when puzzled, and now scratched it with vigor.

He made a careful survey of the grounds for some distance around, hoping to discover something in the way of a clew, but the search was entirely fruitless.

Presently, however, he discerned further traces of blood, some distance up the path, and decided to follow and learn where they might lead to. At about every fourth or fifth step was a drop.

The trail was plain and he had no difficulty in following it. It brought him to the main gateway of the cemetery, where it passed around to the rear of the building at the entrance to a basement room that was occupied by the employees of the burial-grounds.

Harry found the door open, and stepped in.

There sat the old man who had accompanied them on the previous night, and a younger man was bandaging a wound on his head.

"Hello!" greeted Harry. "You came off alive, did you?"

"That is about all he did, too," answered the younger man. "What do you know about this affair?"

"Not half as much as I'd like to, you can bet! Haven't seen anything of my boss and my deaf and dumb pard, have you? They seem to be considerably absent at this roll-call."

"Where did you come from?" inquired the old man.

"From the place where I just waked up," answered Harry. "They laid me out for all night. I followed your trail of blood here."

"And I hardly know how I got here. I remember waking up some time in the night, but I was dazed, and I guess it was by habit that I came here. My son found me unconscious on the step when he came."

"And what do you think about it all?"

"I don't know. I never met the likes of it in all my experience here, that is sure."

"Did you see any one of the fellows well enough to describe him?"

"Not a one. It was dark, you know, and the light having just been put out made it all the darker for us."

"What are you going to do about it? Do you suppose they were common rascals who just made the attack for the fun of it? Or do you think they followed my boss for the purpose of laying him out?"

"How should I know that, lad?"

"You don't know; I asked you what you think."

"Well, I think they had the plan laid for him, then. As to what I'll do, I'll attend to getting well of this crack on my pate."

"You'll report the case, though?"

"To the superintendent, yes, to be sure."

"And I suppose he'll report it to the police, eh?"

"Little good it will do him, I think. We don't know who they were, and I guess they didn't carry off any monymnts with them. What are you going to do?"

"That's what's puzzling me sore," answered Harry, taking off his hat and giving his head another raking. "I think I'll get out Broadway Billy's Brigade, however, and do some tall busting to find him."

"Broadway Billy! Broadway Billy, the detective? Was that young man Broadway Billy?"

"Well, he just was, uncle! And, if he's alive, you can bet a spade or two he will make it lively for these rascals when he gets after them again. But, I'm off. Don't say too much about this."

Without waiting to hear what the old fellow said in response, Harry made his way out of the grounds and took a car leading toward the ferry.

He made no stop for anything until he reached home, where he found Billy's mother and step-father in the greatest anxiety about Billy and the boys. They were very much troubled.

"Where is my boy?" asked Mrs. Watts, eagerly.*

"Here's your youngest, which is the only edition I am able to account for this morning," answered Harry.

"But, where is Billy?" demanded Roger.

"That's what I want to know," echoed Harry. "I hoped I'd find him here. Haven't you seen Seth, either?"

"Neither of them. What has happened? Where did you leave them?"

"We all got left together, mom. There has been one of the consarnedest diffikilties we have been in for a good while."

Harry went ahead from that, and gave the details, as far as he was able, telling them everything.

"What is to be done, Roger?" Billy's mother asked.

"I think the police had better be set to look for him," the old ranger advised.

"And I think the Brigade had better be called out," supplemented Harry.

"The Brigade?"

"Cert. You, Fatty-Skinny, and me—there's three left for duty, anyhow, and we must buckle on the armor and wade in."

"But, what can we do?"

"Do? There's plenty to be done! We have got to find Broadway Billy and Silent Seth, if we have to turn New York and her neighboring cities inside out to do it. We have got to get up and hump. The jeebub hath spoken. Selah!"

"To be sure we have got to find him," agreed Roger, "but I don't know how to go about it. Now, if it was bear, Injun, or renegade, I'd know just how to set to work; but as it is I am all bemuddled. What is your plan, my boy? You know more about the ways of the city than I do."

"Well, I think I'll go and put the police onto it, the first thing. They will buckle to it to a man, when they find Broadway Billy is in trouble. Then we will begin operations on our own hook. I have got a good grip onto the case as it is, knowin' about all the boss and Seth found out, and I think we can make a good showin' for our side."

"What of the lawyer you and Billy talked about at supper last night?" asked Mrs. Watts.

"Crackers an' cheese! that is jest the idee!" cried Harry. "Guess I'll go see him first of all, and pour my tale of woe into his off ear. He'll be able to tell us somethin', sure. 'Sides, he is one of the Brigade in this case."

This move was decided upon.

Harry was provided with some breakfast and Billy's mother bathed the wound on his head, and while this was being done who should come in but Fatty-Skinny.

He entered blowing like a porpoise, for he was so fat it was hard work for him to climb stairs. The moment he appeared he demanded to know where Billy was.

The story was rehearsed for his benefit.

"Great ginger!" the ex-lean lieutenant exclaimed. "I knew something was up. I dreamed about Billy all night, and that's the reason I came here. You can count me in this thing, even if I am on the retired list."

The matter was considered at length, and finally the three, Roger Watts, Fatty-Skinny and Happy Harry, set out for the office of Tilford Millard.

It was still early in the morning, and they reached the lawyer's office not much behind the lawyer himself.

Mr. Millard recognized Harry at once, but looked at the others interrogatively.

Harry made them known, and stated their business.

Mr. Millard gave the matter attention, and looked serious about it. And, at Harry's suggestion, he assumed the role of chief of the Brigade, and the headquarters for the present was to be his office.

About the time their conference ended, who should enter the office but the crazy man, Thomas Tobias Brown!

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY'S MAD MESSENGER.

"HELLO! Hello!"

So the old man exclaimed the moment he entered the office and looked at the group in surprise.

Harry quickly made known to the lawyer who the old fellow was, though that was hardly

* It will be remembered that Billy's mother had married Roger Watts, the old scout who accompanied Billy home from the West.

necessary, since the man's appearance was enough after the description Broadway Billy had given of him.

"What's wanted?" the old man asked. "What are you all doing here? Don't you know this is a private office? Who let you in here?"

He looked from one to another as he put the hurried questions. It was plain to Harry that he was not just now Tommy Brown, the marble-player. The lawyer was as quick to see that.

"How do you do, Mr. Hearn?" he greeted. "We were waiting for you. What has detained ed you?"

"Why, they have had me dead and buried," was the strange response. "I am getting the best of them now, though; I am getting the best of them."

"The best of whom?"

"Why, the ones who buried me when I told them not to do it. I'll show them they can't cheat me."

"Have you found the silver casket yet?" Mr. Millard asked.

"Ha! No, I have not found it yet, but I am on track of it. Did you see the papers I left here?"

"What papers?"

"One was the chart of the secret niche where the casket is."

"There are no such papers here, Mr. Hearn. Besides, you said the silver casket was buried with you."

The old man gave a start.

"That's so!" he cried, "that's so! What am I thinking about? I thought it would be safer there, so I put it in the foot of the coffin. But, who are you? It was not you I told about it."

"Yes, it was; don't you remember?"

"No," and he seemed confused.

"Well, where did they bury you?"

"Why, in the family vault, to be sure."

"Then isn't that the place to go to look for the coffin?"

"Why, sure enough! Why didn't I think about it before? But, then, I forgot that I have been dead."

"And that is strange, too. If you were dead how did you ever get out of the coffin, and out of the stone box, and out of the vault, to come here? You must be mistaken. You must be dead yet."

The old man's face was terribly expressive of the conflict that was going on within, reason trying to rise above the clouds which rested upon it so heavily. He had come to the office in something of his old self, but now he was getting befogged and uncertain.

"Besides, you are not Ruford Hearn, anyhow," the lawyer declared.

"Not Ruford Hearn!"

"Why, no; you are Tommy Brown."

"That's not so—not so!" the old man cried, emphatically.

He seemed to be fighting off an impression that was growing upon him.

"Why, yes you are," the lawyer persisted. "Don't you know? You live at Doctor Dray's, and you play marbles. See, your pockets are full of them."

The old man's efforts were useless. His mind slipped from him and he began to cry like a schoolboy.

"Well, what's the matter, Tommy?" the lawyer then asked.

"Boo-hoo-oo—" the poor old man blubbered. "Doctor Dray took it away from me and would not let me have it any more—Boo-oo-oo—"

"Took what away from you? There, there, now, dry your eyes, Tommy, and tell us all about it."

"He took that—that pa—that paper, and he won't give it back to me. It is mine and I want it, too. He's got to give it to me."

"What paper was it, Tommy?"

"The one with the funny figures on it. Won't you make him give it to me?"

The lawyer gave a significant nod to the others and continued his playing with the broken old man.

"Of course we will make him give it to you, Tommy. What are you going to do with it, though?"

"I am keeping it for Mr. Hearn. He told me to keep it for him and I am going to do it."

"That is a good boy. Where is the doctor now?"

"I suppose he is in his office. He took the paper and went there."

"And how did you get out, Tommy?"

"I got out of the playground. They don't know how I get out of there, but I know."

"Are you not afraid they will find you and take you back and punish you for running away, Tommy? You know you are only a boy."

The old face took on a look of alarm.

"I don't want to go back!" he declared. "Doctor Dray said if I ran away again he would kill me."

"Then how would you like to go to another home where you would be used better?"

"I would like that. But, would they let me play marbles there?"

"To be sure."

"Then I want to go."

He had dried his tears now, and his face brightened with boyish expectancy.

"Very well; you need not go back any more, Tommy. We will take you to another place where you will like it ever so much better. You may play on the floor with your marbles now."

The hint was enough. The poor old man retired to a corner where he began at once to arrange his marbles to play for his own amusement.

"This is a sad case," remarked the lawyer to the others. "I suppose you see the scheme I have in view."

"You mean to steal him away from Doctor Dray," guessed Happy Harry.

"Exactly. I would not consider the old fellow's life safe there, if he is really Ruford Hearn, and the proof is about complete."

"That would be Broadway Billy's plan, you can bet!" averred Harry. "But, this is not finding him very fast. What do you say, Mr. Millard? We must get him and Seth out o' limbo, if it takes a leg apiece!"

"The police must be informed, the first thing," was the answer. "They can handle the case better than we can."

"But, you will have to tell them the whole story," reminded Fatty-Skinny.

"No matter about that; the superintendent is to be relied upon, and he and Billy are friends, you know. He will make every effort to find him."

"That's the best thing to do," urged Roger, the Rover. "But, where are you going to keep this harmless old fellow? If you lose him you lose your case, it seems to me."

"And you are right. I shall take him to my home and detain him there. His mind can be kept occupied till he is wanted. Better still, I will strive to bring him back to his right mind as nearly as may be."

They arranged their plans, and finally the trio of the Brigade made their departure, leaving the lawyer to deal with the crazy man.

When they had gone the lawyer opened his safe and took out the paper Billy had left with him.

Crossing to where the old man was amusing himself with the marbles, he laid it on the floor before him and awaited to see what he would do.

The old man did not notice it at first, but presently he did, catching it up and looking at it eagerly. His marbles were forgotten at once, and a new expression came upon his face.

"What have you there?" the lawyer asked.

"It is the other half," was the joyous answer.

"The other half of what?"

"The plan. Now I can find the place again without trusting to my head and making it ache so."

"But, where is the other half of it? I should think you would need both halves, to make it of any service to you. Have you lost it?"

The old fellow immediately searched his pocket.

"Yes, it is gone," he cried. "Now, where have I put that? Ha! here it is I guess."

He drew a folded piece of paper from his pocket as he uttered an exclamation, but the lawyer saw at a glance it could not be the other half of the chart.

Indeed, he knew well enough that was not in the old man's possession, since he had given proof that it had fallen into the hands of Dr. Dray, that again being proof as to how that rascal had learned what he knew.

The lawyer believed, of course, it had been the doctor, or his tools, who had attacked Billy and his companions in the cemetery.

"That isn't it," he remarked.

"No, so it isn't," was the old man's return.

"Let me see what it is," Mr. Millard requested, gently.

The paper was put into his hand without question, and he opened it. He had no idea it

was anything of interest, but he was mistaken in that.

Upon opening the paper he gave a start of surprise, for it was a written message containing the signature of Broadway Billy. It was addressed to no one, but it told its own story.

It read like this:—

"In the power of that villain, Doctor Dray, and confined in his madhouse. Detain the bearer and keep him from falling again into Dray's hands. His life is not safe here. Decoy Dray away from here and then come to my rescue. If my two boys have appeared you will find them useful. Trust them fully. Yours, WILLIAM WESTON."

"This is good news!" the lawyer said to himself. "He has taken a long chance with this, for it might have been discovered. Still, he knew what he was about, no doubt. Perhaps he helped the old man to escape, and has been the one to put it into his head to come here."

In spite of the rascals, there was light ahead now, and it only remained to rescue Billy and make the arrests.

"But, what of Silent Seth and the silver casket?"

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCERNING BILLY AND SILENT SETH.

THAT affray in the cemetery had been, as we have shown, altogether a one-sided affair.

Coming as it had, suddenly and unlooked-for, there had been no opportunity for defense, and Billy and his team, together with the old man, were speedily overpowered.

All had been knocked senseless save one, and that was Silent Seth. He had been sent spinning to the ground, and seeing the uselessness of further effort, remained quiet. There were four of the attackers, and he could do nothing against so many.

"There, curse them! I guess we have fixed them," he heard one of the men mutter.

"And what's to be done with 'em?" he heard another ask. "We want to get out of this as soon as we can."

"We must take that detective with us," yet another directed. "The others can be left right here. They'll never be able to trace us."

"All right; lay hold onto him, then."

"But, the thing be carried—be sure to get that. That is more important than anything else."

Silent Seth had not forgotten the silver receptacle.

He was looking around in the dark to discover it, but it was too dark for him to discern anything.

The men moving off from him a few steps, he raised himself upon his elbow to get a better chance to search, but leaning over for support upon his hand he thrust his arm into a hole to his shoulder.

His accident made only a slight noise, not enough to draw the attention of the men to him again, and after a moment's pause he proceeded to extricate himself from that dilemma. In doing so, he had to reach out with his other hand, and as he did so that hand came into contact with the very thing he wanted!

He felt something like cloth, under which was a hard object, and he knew at once it was the silver casket.

With a thrill of delight he laid hold upon it; then came the question, what was he to do with it?

That was immediately answered.

That he must dispose of it was certain, for, unless he did so, the men would speedily find it and it would be wrested from him. The hole he had discovered by accident was just the place for it!

The men had moved still further off, and taking the object up carefully and wrapping it, Seth dropped it into the hole.

The hole was not very deep, for the casket touched bottom immediately, and by reaching down Seth could feel it with his hand. The hole had evidently been made for the setting of a post.

Having dropped the casket in, Seth drew some earth down upon it with his hands, and his task was done.

It had not taken him more than a minute at the most, but, he had no time to spare, for barely had he done when the men came back toward him.

Seth rolled over several times to remove himself from the hole, and lay perfectly still as the men came up, feeling around in the grass for the object they were in search of.

"Curse the luck!" cried one. "What has become of it, anyhow?"

"It's here somewhere, that's sure," another

responded. "It couldn't get away unless one of these cusses did, and we got every one of them."

"And they couldn't swallow it, either," observed a third. "Where's that lantern they had? Which one of them had it?"

"The boss had it."

"Get it."

The bull's-eye was speedily forthcoming, and, as Billy had not put it out they quickly had light upon the scene.

All were unconscious save Silent Seth, as said, and he feigned it so well that he deceived the rascals completely. No attention was paid to him, save once when one fellow turned him over with his foot.

The men growled, and from growling began to swear roundly. That availed them nothing, however, for the silver casket was not to be found.

When they had made their search a thorough one, and all were utterly disgusted, one fellow proposed their getting away from there, and the notion finding favor, they did not stand long upon the order of their disappearance.

Broadway Billy was taken up by three of them, while the fourth, who appeared to be an old man, led the way out of the place.

When they had gone some distance Silent Seth scrambled up, and with due caution, followed them.

To remain was useless; to take the silver casket from its hiding place was dangerous, while to follow and see where Broadway Billy was taken was highly important.

First shaking Harry, to find whether he, too, was shamming, and next feeling to learn whether he was living or dead, and discovering that he lived, Seth set off in the direction the men had taken. He could not see them now, but could hear their steps.

Making haste, he came up with them as close as he dared approach, and, Silent Shadower that he was, they were not lost sight of.

He felt that a great weight of responsibility now rested upon him, since he was the only one of the trio capable of doing duty, and he did not want to make any bad plays in the game.

That Harry would presently recover and make his way home he had no doubt, while the security of the silver coffin seemed assured. The men had passed and repassed the holes in their search, but no one of them had given a thought to the possibility of its being there.

The men made their way to one of the less important entrances to the place, where they entered a waiting carriage, having first placed Broadway Billy within.

Seth immediately adopted the old plan of catching on behind, the only plan now open to him, and when the carriage started off he ran along with it with ease. He had tried to swing himself up underneath, but there was no support within reach.

He could hear the men talking inside, but the rumbling of the vehicle and his unfavorable position made it impossible for him to catch what was said.

So the race was kept up for a long distance, and so it would undoubtedly have been kept up to the end, for Seth was tireless; but an accident happened that was as peculiar as it was unlooked-for.

They came presently to a place where the pavement had been torn up for the purpose of repairs to one of the street-car tracks, and Seth could not know anything of this, of course, until he stepped off into the hole. Even then it would not have balked him, but the next moment one of his feet caught fast in a fork of the track and he was jerked loose from the carriage and sent to the ground with stunning force.

The carriage went on, but Seth lay there bleeding and senseless, and so he continued to lie until he was at last discovered by a policeman, along in the small hours of the morning, when he was taken to a hospital.

Meantime Billy had been taken on, across the ferry, and still on until at last the carriage drew into the yard at the rear of Dr. Dray's private asylum.

By this time the young detective had recovered consciousness, but he was gagged and bound securely and thus rendered helpless to offer any resistance or make any outcry that might draw attention.

He was lifted out, taken into the building, and confined in a cell from which escape was next to impossible, bound as he was.

For the remainder of the night he was left to himself, and nothing occurred until morning.

It was a long night to Billy, for sleep was out of the question, and as the hours dragged by he fretted and fumed at the mishap that had

overtaken him and at being thus confined at that critical stage of the game.

He was left bound and gagged all night, too, and when he was at last released he was so stiff he could hardly move.

Some food was brought to him, and later on he was honored by a visit from Dr. Dray.

"Ha!" the old vulture exclaimed, looking in, "what have we here?"

"You may live to find out," cried Billy vengeance.

"Mad, mad," muttered the doctor, with a shake of the head. "Nothing but confinement will do for you."

"What are you holding me for?" demanded Billy.

"Why, do you not know that you are crazy, and that your friends have put you here for treatment?"

This was spoken with a smile that was diabolical.

Billy gave a sneer of contempt, and did not consider it worth his while to respond.

"Yes, as crazy as can be," the old knave declared. "There is but one way to convince us otherwise, and that will be to reveal some secrets which we suppose you have in your keeping."

Billy was silent, willing to let the man have full length.

"I may as well be plain with you," the demon went on. "We want to know what you did with that object you had under your arm last night when some fellows set upon you, and also what you have done with a certain paper that was in your possession."

Still Billy maintained silence.

"You no doubt have some desire to get out of here. Very well, give us this information and we will consider about letting you out."

"Is that all?" Billy asked.

"Yes, that is all."

"Then go about your business and leave me alone. If you think to get anything out of me by force, you will be mistaken."

With that Billy turned his back to the door and would make no response to anything, even though the doctor stood there for some time, execrating and threatening by turns.

Finally he gave it up and went away, vowing that he would find some means of gaining his desired ends.

It was not long after that when another face looked through the grating, and this time it was the face of the crazy old man, Tommy Brown!

Broadway Billy advanced at once to talk with him, and a conversation ensued at greater length than can be noted here.

Billy knew the old man's weakest points, and played upon him accordingly, to gain his object.

The result of his work has been shown. In going to the office of the lawyer the old fellow was only carrying out the ideas which had been put into his mind by Billy, in much the same way, figuratively, as the note had been put in his pocket. And the venture had been successful.

CHAPTER XIV.

SPRINGING A SURPRISE.

FATTY-SKINNY, Roger Watts, and Happy Harry, when they took their leave from the lawyer's office, set at once about the business they had in hand.

The first two were to pay a visit to the institution kept by Dr. Dray, while Harry was to go, in something of a disguise, to watch the Hearn residence, to learn if possible something about the silver casket, which naturally all supposed had been taken off by the men who had made the attack at the cemetery.

Before setting out upon his mission, however, Harry paid a visit to the office, to find whether Silent Seth had yet appeared or not.

He had not, and Harry was exceedingly anxious about his silent partner. He believed, though, that he had met the same fate that had overtaken Billy, whatever that had been.

While Harry was making up his disguise some one tried the door, which Harry had secured within.

Opening the door, the youth-detective found there Mr. Gaddas, the young man from Dr. Dray's institution.

He stepped in with a smile and looked around the room.

"Hasn't Tommy been here?" he asked.

"Nixey!" answered Harry. "His shadder hasn't been on the wall this mornin'. Why, has he sloped off again?"

"Yes, he has got out again, and is giving us no end of trouble to find him. If he should come here would you telephone to us? You see,

there is danger that he will get run over in the street."

"Yes, we'll phone to you, cert."

"Where is Mr. Weston this morning?"

"He hasn't got around yet."

"It's past his office hour, though, isn't it?"

"Yes; but he can't always run by the clock, you know. The best of trains fail to connect sometimes."

"I suppose so."

"Did you want to see him?"

"Not particular. Merely asked for him."

The young man bowed himself out, and as soon as the door had closed Harry laid a finger alongside his nose and closed one eye.

"Christopher Columbia!" he said to himself.

"They shoot over the mark every time the gun goes off. Might jest as well told me he was one of the fellers last night. Only wanted to fish for p'ints, that's all."

A new thought had come to Harry, and hastily changing his disguise, taking up an old man's wig and beard and an old hat, he went out and down to the street, being careful to look well about before he made his appearance.

He caught sight of his man some distance away, and followed.

The fellow evidently had no suspicion of being shadowed, for he went straight ahead without once looking back.

His destination was the Hearn residence, where the door was opened to him by Jane Hearn. He was admitted immediately, proof that he was no stranger there.

Harry waited around for awhile, keeping well out of sight, or as much so as possible, and finally had the satisfaction of seeing the man come out again, and this time in company with Dr. Dray!

Harry trailed them, and was led to the asylum, where he gave up the trail and returned to shadow the house.

In the mean time Fatty-Skinny and Roger Watts had reached the asylum and had been shown into the private office to await the doctor's coming, having been told he had gone out.

When the doctor and his assistant entered, both cast sharp looks of inquiry at the visitors.

"Are you Doctor Dray, sir?" asked the ex-lieutenant.

"Yes, sir," was the smiling response. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"We have called to inquire your terms for taking patients here, and would like to get your lowest rates for a long term, since the one we have in view is probably incurable."

"Is the patient a man?"

"Yes, a man about seventy years old."

"Umm. Not likely to be a very long boarder, then."

The doctor made known his terms and waited to hear what the applicants had to say.

"I think we could pay that; eh, uncle?" and appeal was made to the old ranger for his opinion.

"Yes, I think so," was his response. "You had better tell him all about the old chap, though, James. He's a little unruly at times, sir."

"We care nothing for that," declared the doctor. "We can tame the worst of them, here. We have dark rooms, padded cells, and everything in that line. We do not care how unruly they are."

"Would you mind showing me through your asylum?" asked Skinny.

"Why, certainly not. Alaric, just take them through. You will find everything in order, gentlemen."

The younger man obeyed at once, opening one of the doors leading from the room and bowing them out into a hall.

They were taken through the building and shown the various rooms on the floor above, some of which were well furnished and spoke well for the establishment.

"And where is that padded cell, and the dark room?" asked Roger.

"Yes, we want to see everything while we are about it," declared the fat partner. "We think a good deal of uncle, crazy as he is, and would not want to put him where he would be abused or hurt in any way."

"No fear of that, here, sir. If anything, we are too easy with them. If we were more severe we might have less trouble with them, you see. We put up with a good deal before we resort to harsh measures. This way to the lower floor."

They had returned to the main floor, and were now led below to the basement.

Here were the cells, arranged much as a prison is arranged, and the place had a damp, chilly feeling, real or fancied.

"This is the padded cell, gentlemen," the man

announced throwing open the door of one. "You see, no matter how obstreperous a subject might be, he could not harm himself in here."

The floor and sides were thickly padded, and a bull might have raged in the cell without harm to itself or anything else.

"I should say this is a good thing," Roger observed.

"Yes, it must be," agreed Skinny. "No chance to harm themselves or any one else."

"And the dark room?" suggested Roger.

"Well, here is one," throwing open another door.

It was a dismal place, and the visitors quickly signified their satisfaction.

"Do you have to use these places?" asked Skinny.

"Yes, occasionally," was the response.

"Any one in them now?"

"We have one very unruly subject in that one at the far end of the passage," was the answer.

"Have you seen enough, gentlemen?"

"Well, about enough," answered Fatty-Skinny. "I suppose it is necessary to have such places as these, but, really, I hate to have uncle put in one; don't you, Uncle Roger?"

"Yes, lad; it is rough, that's a fact."

"I must take a look at that man you spoke about," and the ex-lieutenant started toward the end of the passage.

"You had better not," called out the assistant. "He is really dangerous, and you will only excite him by going there; you had better not, sir."

"I won't speak to him; I just want to look in. He can't hurt me through the bars, of course."

"May as well let him have his own way," remarked Roger. "He's bound to see it all, anyhow."

Mr. Gaddas appeared greatly displeased, and went along after the self-willed visitor, Roger following after him.

Skinny was pressing forward, looking into every door he passed, until finally, coming to the end one of all, he gazed in and there saw the object of his search!

Broadway Billy, with a gag in his mouth to prevent him from making too much noise!

It was light enough for them to see well, and Skinny saw his partner's face light up as he recognized him through the bars.

Mr. Gaddas had now come up, looking considerably troubled and very anxious to get the visitors up to the other floor again; whereat Skinny drew back from the door in pretended alarm.

"Well, are you satisfied?" the young man asked.

"Goodness, yes!" answered the ex-lieutenant.

"What is the matter with him?"

"He is mad, desperately mad! If he were to get out I would not want to answer for the consequences."

"So, he's mad, is he?" quoth Roger, after he, too, had taken a peep. "I'll bet he ain't half as mad as we are, eh, pardner?"

The old ranger brought a "popper" to light from under his coat tails, as he spoke, and Skinny did the same, both drawing a bead on the nose of Mr. Gaddas, who turned as pale as death.

"Not near as mad," averred the fat partner. "We're just mad enough to order you to open this door, and if you don't do it on the jump we'll be made enough to blow the whole thatch off from your think-box, and don't you forget it. We mean business, so mosey, or shoot it is!"

"Heavens!" gasped Gaddas, "what are you thinking about?"

"We are thinkin' whether it will be best to plug ye in the eye or in the neck," answered the old ranger, sternly, "ye thunderin' villain!"

"And if you make any noise, or try to give an alarm, we'll try you in both places," declared Skinny. "We came here to get Broadway Billy, and we are going to do it, too, if we have to kill six men to do it!"

This was too much for Mr. Gaddas.

"I give in," he said. "You have done me brown this time. I'll let him out if you'll only promise to let me go—"

"You'll let him out anyhow," broke in the fat pard, "and then the chances are that you will be allowed to go up the Hudson for your health. Open that door, now, and no more delay, or you will get a dose that won't set well on your stomach."

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARING THE PROGRAMME.

MR. GADDAS was cornered, for a fact. He had been neatly overreached by these unknown members of Broadway Billy's Brigade, and he had no way of getting out of the dilemma.

"Yes, yes," he said; "I'll do it, I'll do it. Only don't be hard on me. I am only employed

here, you know; Doctor Dray is the one who is responsible for everything, you know."

"No more palaver, now!" ordered the rotund Skinny, savagely, "but open that door at once. If you are talking to gain time you will find it won't work. Not another second delay, or you will hear something drop. Get a move on you!"

The fellow had been edging near the door; now he reached up and drew the lever that removed the bolts and allowed the door to swing open.

Broadway Billy stepped out and greeted Skinny and Roger with a nod of approval.

Roger immediately removed the gag and freed his bands.

"You are trumps!" Billy cried, grasping their hands. "How did you find me so soon? But, no time for questions now; let's finish this job first."

"If you'll only let me off easy," Mr. Gaddas was pleading, "I'll help you take the doctor, and I'll do anything you say."

"I guess we can get along without your help," retorted Fatty-Skinny. "You just fix him in the same way he had you fixed, Billy, and we'll make short work of the other rascal."

"I'll do it with real pleasure," protested Billy, and the gag was adjusted on Gaddas's mouth with deft dispatch.

"Now," said the fat partner, when the fellow had been gagged and his hands tied, "where are your weapons, Billy?"

"Give it up," Billy answered. "The old mummy took them from me when they dumped me in here last night. But, where are Harry and Seth?"

"Harry is all right, but Seth hasn't turned up yet."

"We must hustle, then."

"Well, here, take my pistol," urged Skinny, "and make the old rat disgorge. We know where to find him."

"All right; lead the way! Roger, you hold fast to the prisoner."

"He's as fast as a b'ar in a trap," the old ranger assured. "He won't git out of my grip, you bet! I'll stick him under the ribs if there's any need of it."

They made their way up the stairs to the main floor, Broadway Billy and the obese lieutenant ahead and the old ranger coming after them with the prisoner.

Once on the main floor Skinny took the lead and proceeded to the office where the doctor had been left.

He opened the door and Broadway Billy stepped in first, revolver in hand, and confronted the infamous old scoundrel.

"Ha!" the old ruffian exclaimed, springing to his feet, "what means this? I want to know what you are doing here, and how you got out—Ho! Ha!"

The fat partner had followed in, and after him Roger Watts and the prisoner. At sight of them the astonished doctor broke off in what he was saying and uttered the ejaculations.

"You will find out what I am doing here, you old knave!" cried Broadway Billy. "You have put your foot into it bad, this time, by making a prisoner of me, even if that were the least of the crimes of which you are guilty. Where have you put my weapons and the handcuffs you took from me?"

The doctor was almost purple in the face, so great was his rage, and was almost choking too.

"You—you—you will find out!" he cried. "How—how dare you come into my presence, this way? By what right do you enter my establishment? How dare you hint that I made a prisoner of you? Are you mad?"

"That sort of bluster won't save you, you infamous scoundrel! and you need not try the influence of your baleful eyes upon me, either. I am looking at the tip of your nose, and you will tempt me to try a shot at it if you do not come to time, promptly; so obey orders!" and Billy held his revolver unpleasantly near, at the same time telling his fat partner to search the office for his weapons and bracelets.

This Skinny did, in spite of all the old reprobate's bluster. The articles were soon discovered lying on a shelf in a closet and were restored to their rightful owner.

"That is the idea!" cried Billy. "Now, just try this pair of darbies on the old dragon's wrists and see if they will fit. I think they will."

At this the doctor made the strongest kind of a protest, but he was as nothing in the grasp of the ponderous "Skinny." The handcuffs were put on and snapped together in a jiffy.

"That looks like it!" said Billy. "Now, the

next thing to be done is to send for police to take charge of this den until we have time to put the thing in proper shape. Skinny, you go and—" Just then the door was opened and into the room stepped Lawyer Millard with half a dozen officers at his back!

"Just in time for the ball," greeted Billy.

"So it seems," responded Millard. "Your friends had little need of us, it appears."

"We have need of you now, however. These officers can take charge of this place, and our prisoners can be held here until we are ready for them. We must pay attention to the others."

It was arranged, and leaving officers in charge, Billy and the others took their leave.

Axious about Silent Seth, Billy's first move was to go to the office, for he knew if Seth was alive and free, he would make his way there as soon as possible.

When they arrived there they were in time to find a District Messenger boy trying the door.

"What do you want?" asked Billy.

"Are you Mr. Weston?" asked the boy.

"Yes."

For proof, Billy unlocked the door and ushered the way in.

"Then here's a message for you," said the boy, "and an answer is wanted to it, quick."

Billy tore open the missive in haste, and found it to be from a hospital across the river.

It informed him that a boy named Seth Martin was there, and that he wanted to see him, as speedily as possible, upon an important matter.

"I will go to him at once," decided Billy, and such was the answer he sent by the messenger. "We must have a conference here first, however, so that each will understand his part."

Such a conference was held. At the end of half an hour it was done, and each knew what was expected of him, and set forth to do his part.

Broadway Billy was to go and see Silent Seth. He believed the boy had some knowledge concerning the silver casket, since search had failed to bring it to light at the doctor's office.

Lawyer Millard was to attend to the crazy man, Tommy Brown—or Mr. Hearn, and if possible keep his mind upon the idea that he was indeed Ruford Hearn. It had been thought best to take away the marbles and to dress him in a manner becoming to a man of his years.

Fatty-Skinny and Roger Watts were to pay a visit to each family of the Hearn descendants to request their presence at the old homestead dwelling at a certain hour, and, too, they were to see to the arrest of the undertaker who had had a part in the affair of years gone by. Each, as said, had his part, and each understood it.

Billy lost no time in reaching the hospital.

He made himself known and was taken to see Silent Seth at once, finding him sitting bolstered up in a chair with his head bandaged.

"He urged so emphatically," exclaimed one of the attendants, "that we thought it best to send for you with haste, for at the time it was feared that his skull was fractured and that he would worry himself into a fever."

"He knew what he was about," assured Billy.

"But, it is strange," observed the attendant, "for since telling him that you had been sent for he has hardly spoken a word. He is a peculiar boy. Why, he was determined to leave here as soon as he came to, and we had to detain him by force, really by force."

"I am not surprised, and I am glad you have sent for me. What do you think of his condition?"

"Why, it is not dangerous. In fact, we can permit him to go if he will be careful. It is not so bad as we thought it at first."

These remarks had been exchanged a little distance from Seth, and Billy now advanced to greet his Silent Shadower.

"Well, Seth," he said, "they laid you out bad, didn't they?"

"It wasn't that," Seth made response; "this was an accident." And he told his employer all that had passed.

"You did a good stroke," Billy complimented, "and you would have done better still, only for this. In you and Harry I have a team to be proud of. Well, they say you may go, so I will get a cab and we will be off at once."

Seth was feeling well enough to travel, and really was all right save for a deep cut in his scalp and a big swelling on his head; so Billy was allowed to take him away.

They set forth at once in a carriage, and in due time were at the cemetery where they had met their mishaps.

Driving as near to the Hearn vaults as possible, they alighted and went forward on foot, and were soon upon the scene of their surprise and defeat, where Seth looked around to get his bearings.

Strange to say, no holes were now to be seen, nor had any new fence been put up. A moment's investigation, however, showed where they had been and had been filled and covered over that very morning! Had the silver receptacle been discovered?

That question immediately suggested itself to Billy and his aid, and their eyes met.

An employee passing the spot just then, Billy hailed him.

"Did you fill these holes?" he asked.

"Oi did dhat same," was the response, with an accent that plainly was not French.

"Did you find a box in one of them?"

"Sure, Oi did not. An ould fince was taken down yesterday, and Oi was tould to fill the holes, so Oi did."

That settled the matter. The silver casket was probably just where Silent Seth had left it, and the man was engaged there and then to look for it, Seth indicating as nearly as he could where he had put it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RASCALS CONFOUNDED.

It was late on that afternoon when Jane Hearn, answering the bell at her residence, received a surprise.

The person she found there was a young man with a graceful mustache, who brought her, he explained, a message from Dr. Dray, to the effect that she should prepare to receive some callers that evening at nine.

This young man, it may as well be said, was Happy Harry in disguise.

The woman questioned him, and Harry told her it was the doctor's intention to meet some members of the family there to settle a matter of business.

When she had gone back into the house, after the departure of the messenger, she fell to wondering what it could mean. There was little time for her to inquire, so she accepted the case as it was and prepared for the guests.

The first to arrive were Hugh Hearn and Mrs. Muster, her brother and sister, who were as much in the dark as Jane herself.

All they knew was that their presence had been requested by Dr. Dray, and so there they were.

They talked the matter over, making all manner of surmises, and as the hour drew near they were anxious for the doctor's coming.

Finally came a ring, and Jane answering it, she was almost floored with amazement at what she beheld. There on the step stood Ruford Hearn, and with him a host of other persons.

With a gasp expressive of her amazement and terror, the woman fell back, and into the house the company filed; Lawyer Millard, Broadway Billy, Fatty-Skinny, Roger Watts, Silent Seth and the prisoners—Dr. Dray, Undertaker Fryers, Alaric Gaddas, and others; and with them Ruford Hearn, Jr., and his sister, Mrs. Atwell.

If this had been a surprise to Jane Hearn, it was none the less so to Hugh and Mrs. Muster, when the company entered the room.

Broadway Billy arranged the company, placing the wily old doctor behind the others so that he could not so easily exert his baleful mesmeric powers upon any one; after which he addressed the company.

"Gentlemen and ladies," he said; "this select party has been arranged for the purpose of righting, as far as possible, a wrong that has been done. About twenty-two years ago a piece of villainy was consummated which has just come to light in a strange manner. Mr. Millard will give you the matter in detail."

With that Billy gave the floor to the lawyer, who was fired for the occasion.

The prisoners, and also the three of the Hearsns who were in league with them, looked very pale, and moved uneasily upon their chairs.

"Yes, a most detestable piece of villainy it was," cried the lawyer, as he rose to speak. "Mr. Ruford Hearn was pronounced dead, and pretended to be buried, while he was in reality confined in a private mad-house where constant harrowing finally did unsettle his already weakened mind. But, Providence has interfered, and we are here on this occasion to expose that villainy and to restore the much wronged old man to his rights."

"I will begin by questioning the most important witness present, and that witness is—Mr. Ruford Hearn himself."

There were exclamations of amazement from Ruford, Jr., and his sister.

A chair was placed, and Mr. Hearn was asked to step forward and occupy it, which the old gentleman did promptly and with a firm step and manner.

"What is your name?" the lawyer asked.

"Ruford Hearn, Senior," was the response.

"Can you prove your identity?" was the next inquiry.

"I can."

"How?"

"By producing from its hiding-place, before these witnesses, my will, the only will I ever signed, together with other valuable papers."

"Very well, sir; you are at liberty to proceed."

The old man arose with calm dignity and took from his pocket the two parts of the mysterious chart, or plan, which had been restored to him for the purpose, and laid them together on the table.

Then, with a draughtsman's rule, square, and compasses, he proceeded to measure along the floor and wall, going by inches, squares, parts of circles, etc., as indicated on the chart, until finally, when the interest of the company had been worked to a high pitch, he finished.

Pressing with his finger upon the wall at the point where his last measurement ended, a secret door there flew open, greatly to the surprise of all save the few who were in the secret.

The door being open, the old man reached up confidently and felt for something, but finding nothing he drew back with a frightened look upon his face, while he exclaimed:

"The silver casket! It is gone!"

"As crazy as a bug," sneered Dr. Dray, aloud.

"Not so crazy as you would have him appear," retorted the lawyer. "Sit down again, Mr. Hearn, and answer a few questions."

The old man obeyed, resuming his chair.

"Twenty-two years ago, Ruford Hearn, you executed your will, making it more in favor of the two children by your first wife than of the three, by your second. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, certainly, I do remember that; and I put the will in the little silver coffin casket, and the coffin in the secret niche, making these plans at the same time so that I could not fail of finding it again, yet making them so puzzling that no one else would be likely to discover the place."

"Exactly. Well, after you had made your will you felt that perhaps you had dealt unjustly with the children of your second union, so you undertook a scheme to learn just which ones of your children really cared for you. You took into your confidence Doctor Dray and Peter Fryers, two trusted friends. The plan was that you were to pretend illness. The doctor was to pronounce it a dangerous and very contagious malady, and you were to pretend to die. The undertaker was to take charge of the matter then, and bury the coffin without permitting any one to see you."

"Yes, yes; I recall all that."

"Well, the plan was carried out, and from the moment when your ailment was pronounced so dangerous, not one of the three children of your second marriage could be urged to go near you. The other two came promptly, to offer their help, but they were denied the privilege. You died, it was said, and you were privately buried, your daughter Jane finally agreeing to accompany the body to the cemetery, in company with her brother Hugh. Now, do you remember what you did with the silver casket on the night before your funeral, when the coffin rested over there, filled with bricks?"

"Ha! Yes, yes! Now it comes to me! All alone here, I took the silver coffin casket from its hiding-place and put it in my coffin, determined that it should be safe till such time as I could make up my mind to reveal myself."

"Exactly, sir; and there it was found last night. And, here it is, in the possession of this gentleman. Will you now open it for us?"

Roger Watts produced the little silver receptacle.

It was laid upon the table in the presence of all; then the aged man went forward, and, with trembling hands, touched a secret spring, and the lid of the little coffin-shaped casket flew open at once.

"This is it! This is it!" the old man cried joyfully. "And, here is the will! And here are the other papers! Yes, yes! It is just as I left it; it has never been opened!"

"That will do," said the lawyer. "Sit down again, and I will conclude, exposing the dia-

bolic game that was undertaken and successfully carried out."

Mr. Hearn sat down, and the lawyer resumed: "Your two pretended friends, Dray and Fryers, played you false. They had pledged you their word that they would help you to play the part, and in the end would acknowledge it so that there could be no question of your purpose, or your identity, if that should be doubted. Late on the night before your funeral Dr. Dray came here and you went away with him to his residence. You never was yourself again. Under his keeping your mind was disordered. He and the undertaker had plotted to betray you, and once you were in their power they laid their scheme before the three children of your second wife. A will was to be forged, leaving everything to these three, and they, in turn, were to pay the doctor and undertaker round sums for their part in the matter. So it was agreed, and so it was carried out.

"You escaped them, and did appear to make your identity known, but your word was doubted in the face of the evidence. Then came Dr. Dray, swearing that you had been for years in his care and that your true name was Brown. This was investigated, and by the doctor's skillful workings his story was proven true. So the case ended. It was a dastardly piece of business, but it was successful, and while you have been all these years in a mad-house, and your favorite children kept in comparative poverty, these rascals have enjoyed your wealth. So it might have gone on to the end, but for the visit you paid to the office of this young detective, during one of your spells of part sanity. He read the truth of your statement with that keen insight the true detective alone possesses, and took up the case for you at once. Favored somewhat by circumstances, he has been able to bring the villainy to light in a remarkable manner in a very short time. I now leave it for him to present the proofs."

The lawyer sat down and Broadway Billy once more took the floor.

"You have all heard the story," he said. "The truth of it is written plainly upon the faces of the guilty ones. The proof of it is in the fact that Ruford Hearn is before you alive, now in his eighty-third year. Last night I paid a visit to the Hearn vault, and from the coffin that was supposed to contain his body, but which was filled with bricks, I took this little silver casket. My visit there was suspected, or else Mr. Hearn had let out the secret to Doctor Dray, and I was set upon and taken prisoner and confined in the mad-house, where I might have remained but for the promptness of my two boy assistants in finding me out and rescuing me. These proofs, the empty coffin, the presence of the man himself, and the papers in the silver coffin, are enough. There is nothing further needed to convict."

"Still I laugh at you," cried out Doctor Dray. "This is only a scheme to blackmail us. It is well gotten up, but it will not work. I defy you!"

"Let us see about that, you rascal," spoke up the aged man, apparently now in full possession of his mind. "Let the papers in the silver coffin be brought out and read."

Broadway Billy stepped forward and took them up.

"The first was the will, which divided the estate between the two children of the first marriage, leaving only small sums for the other three. Then was taken up another paper which proved to be a written agreement between Mr. Hearn on one hand and Dray and Fryers on the other, in which was set forth his scheme and their agreement to serve him in it for considerations named. Further, and the worst, was another paper setting forth the truth that the three children of the supposed second marriage were not heirs at all, they really being the offspring out of wedlock. And then appeared other papers and documents to prove the truth of these statements."

The evidence was ample and not to be set aside. Broadway Billy was triumphant, Happy Harry was jubilant, and Silent Seth was content. The expose was perfect, the victory complete.

The half-hour that followed can better be imagined than described.

The unprincipled old doctor and his rascally accomplice, the undertaker, had been caught in their own trap, and were obliged to acknowledge the truth of their whole villainous scheme.

The three supposed heirs were overwhelmed by the revelation which had been made, and were more than vehement in their protestations

and wild in their indignation. There were the proofs, however, and there was old Ruford Hearn in person to support them.

The detective and the lawyer had taken out warrants, and all the prisoners were arrested and committed for trial, on several counts for heinous offenses.

By the efforts of Lawyer Millard the old case, so long ago settled, was reopened, and there was a complete reversion. Not only so, but the guilty ones were, in brief time, duly sentenced for their crimes.

Old Mr. Hearn, with his wits quite restored, now that the power of the old doctor was broken, resumed his abode at his old residence, where he was cared for by his daughter, Mrs. Atwall, and her children, she being a widow.

The old will was permitted to stand in favor of his son and daughter, and is hidden away in the little silver coffin-casket in the secret niche in the wall—now secret no longer yet known only to those who are interested.

Happy Harry and Silent Seth speedily recovered from their slight wounds, and were none the worse for them.

They, with the other members of the "Brigade" were proud of the achievement Broadway Billy had made with their help, and Lawyer Millard, whose lasting friendship all had won, was proud of them all.

Roger Watts and Fatty-Skinny, though now on the retired list, as Skinny expressed it, declared themselves ready for duty at any time when it became necessary to call out the whole Brigade. They had done a good stroke this time, certainly.

The case made quite a sensation, and Broadway Billy and his "team" were extolled greatly. Silent Seth took it all with his usual philosophical imperturbability, but the irrepressible Harry showed his delight much after the manner of a frisky colt. Billy was quiet about it, save in the home circle, where he declared he had been only a lame horse in the race this time, and that he would surely have been left badly had it not been for his "Brigade."

"We got there, you bet, and with both feet, too!" was Harry's exultant declaration. "And we're going to get there every time, too. Christopher Columbia! we are in the race to win, and when we don't win it won't be our fault; crackers and cheese, no! I speak for Silent Seth, too, since he is too bashful to speak for himself. We are open for business at the old stand, and whenever any consarned diffikility presents itself we are going to crack the whip and go for it. That's the kind of cherubs we are. The jeebeeb bath spoken. Selah!"

THE END.

Beadle's Dime Library.

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- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers.
- 174 The Phantom Knights.
- 159 Red Rudiger, the Archer.
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- 483 Wizard Will's Last Case; or, Ferrets Afloat.
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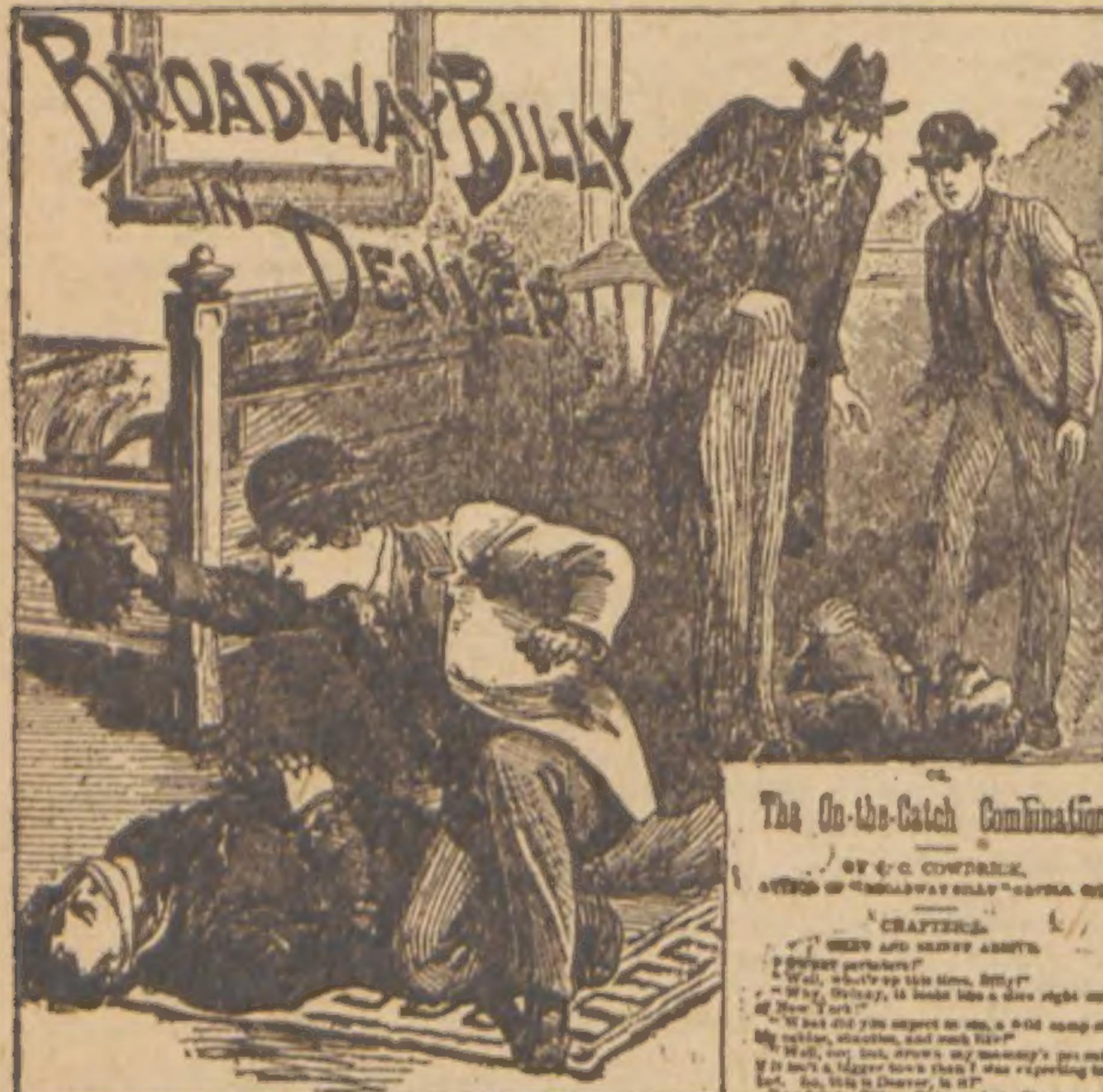
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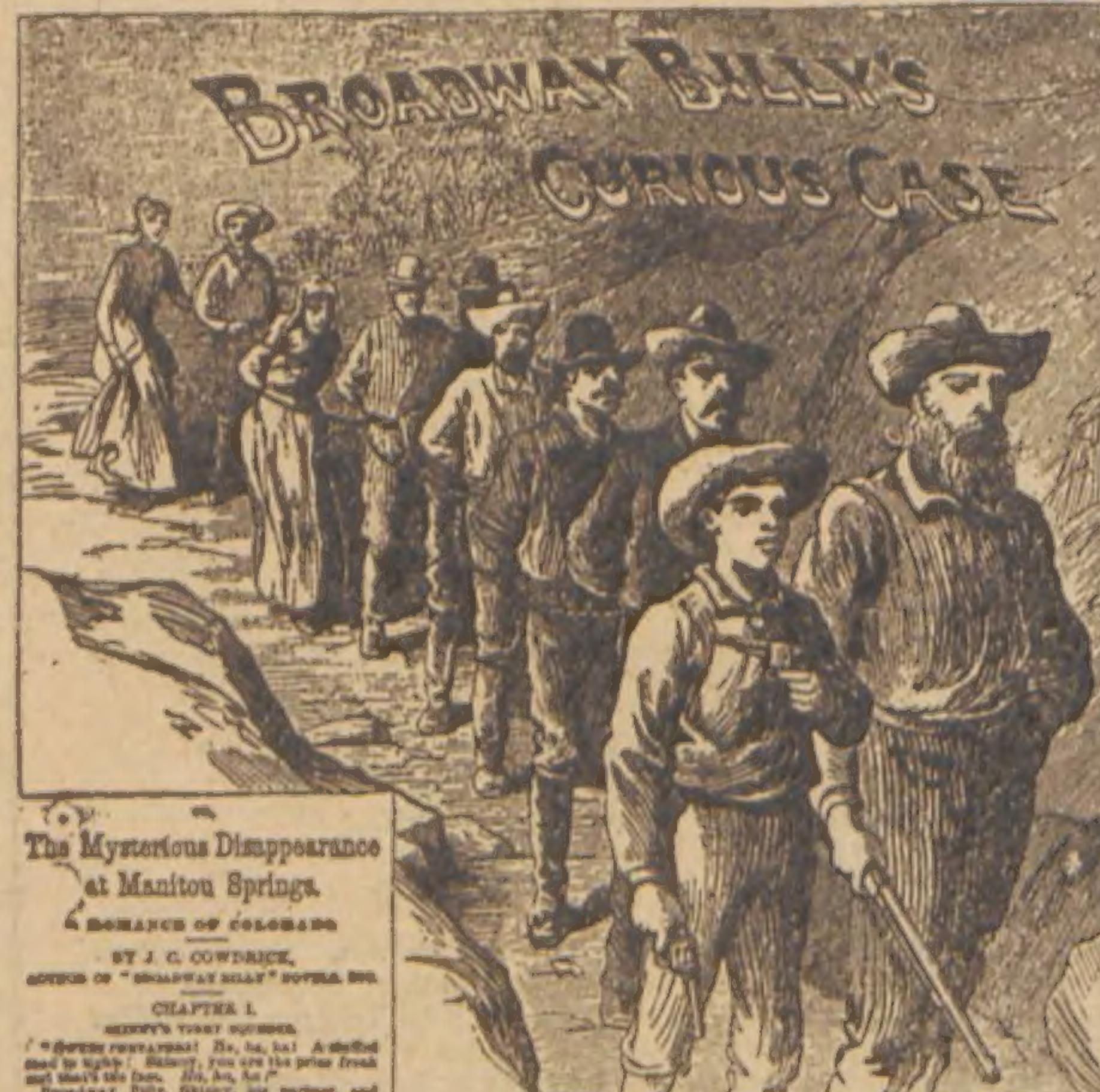
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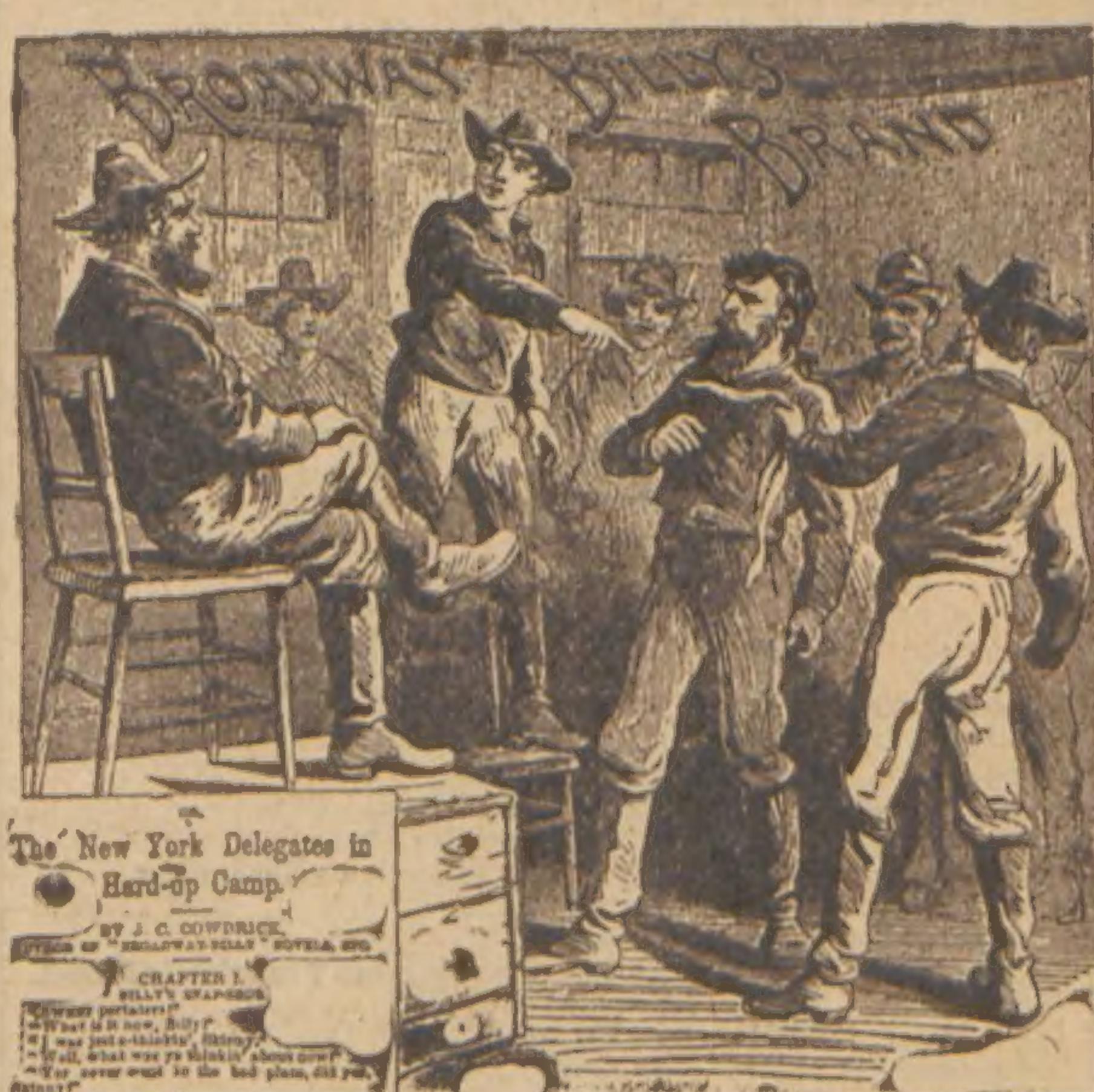


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